

**UNCEASING OCCUPATION: LOVE AND SURVIVAL
IN THREE LATE-TWENTIETH-CENTURY
CANADIAN WORLD WAR II NOVELS**

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ABSTRACT:

The unprecedented acts of brutality, persecution, and genocide perpetrated in the Second World War caused ruptures within language, creating a need for both individual and collective re-definitions of love, privacy, truth, and survival. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of Second World War fiction in both Canada and abroad, which suggests a need among contemporary authors to analyse and to understand retrospectively the way World War II has influenced current political and racial divisions. By looking specifically at the romantic relationships depicted in *The Ash Garden*, *The English Patient*, and *The Walnut Tree*, three Canadian World War II novels all written approximately fifty years after the war, this thesis not only examines the question of what is necessary for survival and how the public world of war either enables or inhibits individual survival, but also isolates how race, gender, and the public world influence the characters' ability to endure in reciprocal love.

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INTRODUCTION:
THE LASTING RESONANCE OF WAR.

In the prologue to her novel *Fugitive Pieces*, Anne Michaels demonstrates how wartime experience is not merely an event that happens and is forgotten, but rather a transforming occurrence that continues to shape an individual's life long after the actual combat has ceased: "Shortly before his death, [Jakob] Beer had begun to write his memoirs. 'A man's experience of war,' he once wrote, 'never ends with the war'" (Michaels prologue). The major catastrophes of World War II, such as genocide, combat, the atomic bomb, and enemy occupation, pose threats to an individual's survival which dominate his or her life and continue to influence all subsequent decisions he or she makes even after the devastation has officially ended. Although this claim refers specifically to someone who personally experienced the war, the after-effects of war and its presence in the collective memory of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries manifests itself through the resurgence of the Second World War in contemporary literature and film. Jakob Beer's statement in *Fugitive Pieces* can therefore be expanded to read, "*Humanity's* experience of war never ends with the war," which offers some explanation for the extensive retrospective art that authors and artists continue to produce nearly sixty years later.

In the last twenty-five years, there has been an abundance of Second World War fiction published throughout the world and in Canada. Although the following list is not complete, its length testifies to the recent renewed interest in the lasting implications of World War II: *Famous Last Words* (1981), by Timothy Findley; *Schindler's List* (1982), by Thomas Keneally; *The Remains of the Day* (1989), by Kazuo Ishiguro; *Time's Arrow* (1991), by Martin Amis; *The English Patient* (1992), by Michael Ondaatje; *Stones from the River* (1994), by Ursula Hegi; *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1995), by David Guterson; *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), by Anne Michaels; *The Electrical Field* (1998), by Kerri Sakamoto; *The Walnut Tree* (1999), by Martha Blum; *The Ash Garden* (2001), by Dennis Bock; *The Russländer* (2001), by Sandra Birdsell; *Austerlitz* (2001), by W.G. Sebald; *The Truth About Death and Dying* (2002), by Rui Umezawa; *Children of Paper* (2002), by Martha Blum; and *One Hundred Million Hearts* (2003), by Kerri Sakamoto. This pattern corresponds to a similar trend in the United States with the production of films like *Schindler's List* (1993), directed by Stephen Spielberg; *The English Patient* (1996) adapted and directed by Anthony Minghella; *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), directed by Stephen Spielberg; *The Thin Red Line* (1998), directed by Terrence Malik; and the mini-series *Band of Brothers* (2001), directed by Tom Hanks and Stephen Spielberg.

The unprecedented acts of violence, terror, and persecution perpetrated in World War II subsequently challenged and undermined the meanings of words and concepts, creating a need for both individual and collective re-definitions of fundamental ideas such as love, privacy, truth, and survival. This thesis will analyze the complex romantic relationships depicted in *The Ash Garden*, by Dennis Bock,

The Walnut Tree, by Martha Blum, and *The English Patient*, by Michael Ondaatje in order not only to understand the ways in which specific characters either achieve or fail to survive both individually and in reciprocal love but also to isolate how race, politics, and the public world influence their ability to communicate and to endure in love. Moreover, it will argue that the love relationships within these three works developed as they did only because of the Second World War and the political divisions that continue to fester nearly sixty years later.

The three novels studied in this thesis, all written approximately fifty years after the end of World War II, testify to its lasting influence not only on individuals directly persecuted by it, like Martha Blum, but also on people who were born years after conflict. This study was not intentionally developed as an analysis of “Canadian” literature; I chose these three novels because they had overlapping but different perspectives on the relationship between love and war. Furthermore, the three diverse perspectives from which each text is written helps to illustrate specifically the lasting resonance of the Second World War in the twenty-first century. While Dennis Bock writes from the perspective of a young Canadian attempting to explain and come to terms with horrors that he has not personally experienced, Martha Blum provides the testament of a Jewish Ukrainian-Canadian Holocaust survivor who was forced to resume her life in Canada after losing twenty-eight family members in the Holocaust (Bell 1). Michael Ondaatje, who was born in Sri Lanka and immigrated to Canada in 1962, offers a third viewpoint of World War II that broadens the analysis to include an Eastern perspective. *The Ash Garden* and *The English Patient* take similar moral, rhetorical, and ideological positions where

the dropping of the atomic bomb is concerned. Their perspectives, which have developed out of a worldwide historical debate, are not universally shared and belong to a particular point of view that, only recently, have been permitted a voice in public.

The initial idea for this thesis developed out of Hannah Arendt's distinction between murder and genocide in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, which helps to explain the extent to which unprecedented acts of destruction, like the Holocaust, have affected both language and creative processes. She explains that because genocide violates an entirely different community than murder, justice cannot prevail if both genocide and murder receive the same punishment:

For just as a murderer is prosecuted because he has violated the law of the community, and not because he has deprived the Smith family of its husband, father, and breadwinner, so these modern, state-employed mass murderers must be prosecuted because they violated the order of mankind, and not because they killed millions of people. [. . .] The point of the latter is that an altogether different community is violated. (272)

Arendt isolates a distinction between crimes of murder, such as the premeditated destruction of one member of the Smith family, and the attempt to obliterate an entire race; “order” and “community” have different meanings in the context of these two crimes. Although murder occurs in genocide, the repercussions of genocide resonate with a completely different community. Language enables

Arendt to identify this dissension because the word “genocide,” which according to the United Nations “is the direct physical destruction of another racial or national group” (“genocide”), contains in its meaning a connection to the particular community it violates. When a particular individual, group, or system causes either the destruction, or the attempted annihilation of a group of human beings, this act “[violates] the order of mankind,” not merely the community from which the victims came.

Genocides such as the Holocaust create lasting ruptures not only within justice systems that existed prior to the atrocity but also within the value systems a society which are represented through language. Survival is a universal need of all living things, which even during peacetime embodies an array of meanings depending on one’s individual circumstances. During wartime, however, its significance alters in response to the unimaginable challenges to both individual and collective emotional, physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual endurance. *The Walnut Tree*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The English Patient* all analyse the question of what it means to survive, and all three conclude that physical survival in wartime does not ensure that an individual will likewise emerge from battle as an emotionally, spiritually, and morally functioning human being. In connection with this disjunction between physical and emotional survival, these authors suggest that in the process of ensuring their physical survival, their characters’ value systems, abilities to love, or both, are either crippled or completely destroyed.

World War II became a subject of Canadian literature even before the war ended. In her book *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel*,

Dagmar Novak traces the development of early Canadian war fiction by grouping it according to two themes that continue to operate in *The English Patient*, *The Walnut Tree*, and *The Ash Garden*. The first group of novels, which contains works like G. Hebert Sallans' *Little Man* (1942), Edward Meade's *Remember Me* (1946), and Hugh Garner's *Storm Below* (1949), all focus on what Novak calls the "little man" theme: "a constant tension exists within the individual's consciousness as he attempts to come to terms with his role as a soldier. The dominant theme is that of the 'little man,' increasingly alienated from the cause for which he is fighting and from his own moral identity" (Novak 96-7). Sallans, Meade, and Garner all foreground the remoteness and helplessness of their characters, who, in the attempt to survive emotionally, become detached from others around them and begin to feel that human life has no meaning (Novak 109).

The characters in *The English Patient*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The Walnut Tree* likewise suffer from this sense of alienation; however, their estrangement is much more complicated than the separateness Novak describes. The first major difference between the above-mentioned group of novels and the three that form the subject of this thesis is the relationship the characters in the latter have to World War II. While the protagonists of Sallans, Meade, and Garner are all soldiers, neither Ondaatje, Bock, nor Blum depicts characters who participated in battle. In *The Walnut Tree*, Süssel, a Ukrainian Jew who becomes a prisoner in a Nazi hospital during the war, becomes detached from her sense of morality because of *how* she chooses to survive the Holocaust. Anton, a scientist who developed and tested the American atomic bombs in *The Ash Garden*, faces a similar moral predicament from the other end of

the spectrum. Unlike Süssel, who struggles with her sense of guilt at how she copes with her own sense of victimization, Anton is alienated from his sense of morality for how he chooses to participate in the slaughter of innocent Japanese civilians through his contribution to the atomic bombs. Although Anton's sense of doubt manifests itself after he witnesses the eradication he helped to create and he does not embrace his feelings of guilt, his individual decision places him within the larger political world. In *The English Patient*, Kip, an Indian sapper for the British army faces a similar crisis: he becomes alienated from Britain's war when the United States drops the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But, unlike the characters in the early novels who battle the moral dilemma of being soldiers confined in a world where destruction is necessary, Kip's personal crisis arises out of historical and current political issues of imperialism and the domination of coloured races by whites.

In *Little Man*, Sallans investigates the relationship between the public world of war and the individual private circumstances of his characters in order to give meaning to his characters' private sense of anguish. George Battle, the main character, suffers the loss of his son Hal; however, in response to this personal loss, George consoles himself by reflecting on Hal's death as part of a much greater collective loss:

Even tragedy, however, does not render him incapable of a larger perspective, and he acknowledges that [. . .] his own private losses are part of a far greater loss. In his ability to perceive both his own

relative insignificance and to arrive at a point where he has gained this perspective, George becomes a transitional figure. (Novak 106-7)

In this circumstance, by recognizing the magnitude of the public pain that surrounds him, George sedates his private sense of grief. His sense of individual suffering becomes insignificant in the context of the collective loss the world has undergone because of war. While in *Little Man*, the characters' personal lives and relationships are submerged in the large-scale loss created by war, in *The English Patient*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The Walnut Tree*, the characters' personal sense of grief and loss cannot be separated from the extensive public grief that war generates. Ondaatje, Bock, and Blum highlight the inseparable connection between the public political world and their characters' private turmoil.

Novak pinpoints a shift in Canadian war fiction with the production of *Execution*, written by Colin McDougall in 1958. The "little man" theme that she isolated in the first wave of writing shifts in the works of McDougall, Allister, and Jackson, and the central motif becomes that of an ethical man confined within the depraved environment of war attempting to cope with his lack of control over his own destiny:

Although Sallans, Meade, and Garner begin to deal with the psychological problems of alienation and despair that their protagonists face, it is not until the appearance of Colin McDougall's *Execution* (1958), William Allister's *A Handful of Rice* (1961), and James Jackson's *To the Edge of Morning* (1964), that the focus

changes from the physical terrors of actual warfare to the psychological trauma that results from it. (Novak 111)

In *Execution*, the main character, Adam, searches for a way to continue his life after witnessing and participating in the devastation of war. One refuge, McDougall suggests, from the world where “killing is compulsory” is the act of giving oneself to another in the private act of sex: “Adam learns that people retain the ability, however slight it may be, to regain their emotional and psychological balance. As he discovers, in giving of oneself, not only can one make life endurable for others, one can also restore one’s own well-being” (Novak 116).

The question of restoration or survival operates in the love relationships in *The English Patient*, *The Walnut Tree*, and *The Ash Garden*; however, all three novels problematize McDougall’s suggestion that giving oneself to another is in fact restorative. These novels ask the question of what is necessary for survival and how individual survival is either enabled or inhibited by the public world of war. In *The Walnut Tree*, because Max and Süssel share not only common suffering through their persecution during the Holocaust but also a shared past that provides them with a sense of meaning after the war, they can mutually reconcile their private losses with the widespread public sense of anguish. On the contrary, in *The Ash Garden* and *The English Patient*, the characters’ attempts to resolve their actions in the public world of war with their personal sense of morality interferes with their private love relationships, which in the past served as refuge from the other psychological traumas of war. Anton’s relentless unwillingness to admit the latent sense of guilt that has festered within his conscience and his body since his exposure to the

destruction he helped to orchestrate in Japan destroys his own and his wife's opportunities for a meaningful and prosperous life, which ultimately results in Sophie's death. Similarly, in *The English Patient*, after the atomic bombs explode in Japan, Kip's alienation operates on two planes: he not only distances himself from the war and his role as a British compatriot but also ends his romantic relationship with Hana, a white, French-Canadian woman whom he meets while in the villa in Italy.

The prevalence of the Second World War in contemporary fiction therefore implies a continued struggle to come to terms with its various horrors, especially those of the Holocaust and the atomic bombs, which threatened the future of all people everywhere. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their analysis of women's reactions to World War II entitled "Charred Skirts and Deathmask: World War II and the Blitz on Women," explain specifically how the Second World War obliterated the boundaries between soldier and civilian that had previously obscured relationships between men and women in World War I:

Indeed, if World War II had any singularity, it was the first *total war*, waged by all against all. The whole female population, not just the women serving in the air and armed forces, was no longer insulated from the brutality of the battlefield. (214)

During the Second World War, divisions between soldiers and civilians may have decreased as a result of advanced weapon technology; however, the new schisms based on race, gender, and nation which arose and persisted long after the war officially ended have become the subjects of modern Canadian war fiction.

CHAPTER I:
**EXILED IN WAR: CONTAMINATION OF LOVE IN *THE WALNUT TREE*,
THE ASH GARDEN, AND *THE ENGLISH PATIENT*.**

But we should never lose sight of the glorious, untouchable sun that
is love. . . . Never let me write a word about love that is not praise of
love. It is only its perversions that sting in my poetry and on my
skinny skin. The hare that circles, a vulture beaked and taloned about
the dove, poor thing – but beautiful because it is, in the New
Testament sense, always poor and therefore able to pass through the
eye of a needle. – Anne Wilkinson

In her article “The Other Questioned: Exoticism and Displacement in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*,” Eleanor Ty uses the term “war-damaged wanderers” to describe the main characters in *The English Patient*. This label can be extended to include the characters in *The Ash Garden* and *The Walnut Tree*, both of which contain protagonists who are “dislocated and displaced from their origins” (12). In *The Ash Garden*, Dennis Bock makes a statement parallel to Ty’s assertion, claiming that World War Two “makes exiles out of all of us” (149). Although the terms “exile” and “war-damaged wanderers” resonate literally in each of these three novels whose characters’ lives have been not only forcibly relocated to various

foreign locations throughout the world, but also significantly impoverished or “damaged” because of the war, they also figuratively represent the chasm war creates in the characters’ language and social networks.

Lawrence Langer, in his book *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit*, explains one problem with understanding the wide-reaching manifestations of the Holocaust, which stems from the rupture this atrocity created in the previously accepted worldview of Western civilization. Although his discussion centres on the genocide of European Jews in the Holocaust, his explanation of the way language is dissolved and rendered useless through war can also be applied to other previously unimaginable horrors like the atomic bomb and the terror of battle that became reality during World War II:

All survivor accounts, and all narratives about survivors and their experience, are limited by a number of inescapable restrictions. They speak of a world where the values cherished by western civilization were moribund; but they speak *to* (and from) a world where those values presumably remain intact. (8)

These changes to both pragmatic and psychological aspects of life create disruptions within concepts like morality and humanity, which dictate behaviour among human beings. The notion of exile therefore operates symbolically in *The Walnut Tree*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The English Patient* in terms of the characters’ relationship to the so-called order of the world in which they live; the codes of morality embedded in the characters’ pre-war value systems become meaningless in the context of the

depravity and brutality created by war, thus metaphorically “exiling” the characters to a place where their language is no longer applicable.

The one force that operates in opposition to the eradication of physical, social, and psychological aspects of the protagonists’ lives in these three novels is reciprocal love, which is depicted as a creative, liberating force that in some circumstances serves as a refuge amidst the destructive, crippling atmosphere of war. For love to have this transcendental quality, however, both lovers must be willing to render themselves completely vulnerable to the other person, thus engaging through their love-making in mutual possession. Each of these three works implies that it is only through this type of surrender that reciprocal love can enable the characters either to create something beautiful in themselves and one another, or to produce a common language, what Ondaatje calls “an entire civilization,” through their love-making that is separate from the debilitating reality of war. And yet, although in each novel love functions in a creative, consolatory way, the perverted world created by war eventually permeates and distorts even the language created by love.

In *The Walnut Tree*, a novel that traces the lives of Süssel and Max, two Austrian Jews who escape the Holocaust and start a new life in Canada after the Second World War, Martha Blum uses the language of possession to describe both positive and destructive aspects of love. Süssel’s perspective dominates at least half of the novel and provides thorough commentary not only on how love operates in her life before, during, and after the war, but also on how her idea of love matures and develops from childhood, through adolescence and young adulthood, to middle

age. Before the war, a period which includes Süssel's life from childhood to her early twenties, Süssel describes her position in romantic and filial love relationships in terms of possession and her need to have the power to decide when and whom she loves. As a seventeen-year-old girl, she tells Max, whom at this time she has promised eventually to marry, that she will never allow another person to own her:

I am the one who chooses, Max. I have promised to marry you, and truly, no one could love me with such perseverance, but I just may not. We have the same rhythm when walking, I swing to your tunes. [. . .] And above all, I know you'll always be here for me. But I have wild ways. I'm my own master and I won't be possessed by anyone.

(Blum 24-5)

Süssel's strong-willed, selfish response manifests largely from her youth and intense desire to explore her womanhood, adult life, and the world. But, despite her insistence on being the one in control during her early conversations with Max when she is still sexually inexperienced, she recognizes the freedom that develops out of mutual submission with her first lover.

Süssel's first significant sexual relationship, which occurs before both the war and her departure out of Austria for university, is with a middle-aged man to whom she refers as her "summer lover." She describes him with the realistic melodrama of a seventeen-year-old girl who believes she is "in love" for the first time, privately calling him her prince who was "born out of a tear" (Blum 41). When Süssel describes their lovemaking, she adopts the same language of ownership

she used when talking to Max; however, in this scene, she admits her own willingness to submit herself to her lover:

And I gave myself to him with such savage abandon as if to God. It was new to him. He had to both learn and teach. I saw a man's body fully naked for the first time. *Uncovering nakedness is possession. The sight alone carries the unconscious power of marriage; [. . .]* Days and days and days of taking and giving our bodies. In search of the skill to unlock the unknown. (Blum 41-2)

The language of this passage highlights that their lovemaking is reciprocal; they simultaneously take and give in the attempt to liberate something in themselves and each other. Süssel completely surrenders herself to her “summer lover,” an action so passionate she compares it to the spiritual act of yielding to God. Despite her youth and inexperience in love, Süssel realizes that she will both learn from and teach this man over twenty years her senior. She experiences the power in lovemaking both to release undiscovered elements of herself and her lover, and to create a deeper understanding of what she calls “the unknown.”

As a middle-aged woman after the war, Süssel's recognition of the way possession operates in love reaches maturity in her willingness to give Max the power of rekindling their relationship. Süssel's determination to be her own “master” and love Max only on her own terms is replaced by a decision to wait for him:

I'm old at love, no novice as Max was and perhaps is. I wanted him near, and it surprised me. I took his hand and he blushed. [. . .] I

would have fallen onto the sand in a swoon, my body on his body, losing consciousness, but Max did not allow it. And I had to wait, let the in-between years speak, show themselves, and see where I could link into that chain. On his terms, this time. (Blum 207)

In this passage, Süssel recognizes how she has matured from the obstinate teenager she was before the war into a middle-aged woman with the capacity for compromise that enables her emotional fulfillment in love. She sees his life as a chain: one continuous, single structure created by separate pieces that, in order to join, she must allow Max to create a partnership with her, rather than attempt to master him.

Like *The Walnut Tree*, one of the central relationships depicted in *The Ash Garden* is that between Anton, a German scientist who, after travelling to the United States to share his advanced knowledge of explosives in the early years of the Second World War, helped to develop the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Sophie, a German Jew whose parents orchestrated her escape from Europe which ended unexpectedly in Quebec. Sophie and Anton begin their married life together shortly after meeting in 1943 at Camp L in Quebec (Bock 139). In the early part of their marriage, Anton exposes his vulnerability to her both in his letters and their lovemaking, which is filled with hope:

Their first months had been a dizzying, exhausting time. [. . . T]hey learned to leave their shame behind and explored the pleasures contained within the fingertips, the nape of the neck, the point where flesh was softest. [. . .] Their fingers and close breaths discovered in the opposite body the hidden temptations, and offered a liberation and

confidence where once only confinement and shame had reigned.

(Bock 55-6)

Like Süssel and her “summer lover” in *The Walnut Tree*, Anton and Sophie relinquish their defences in order to create growth within themselves and each other. Moreover, their love has an added complexity because it provides them with a refuge from the devastating circumstances around them. At this point in the novel, both characters have witnessed the effects of war: Anton, although by choice, left behind his mother in Germany, while Sophie forcibly lost contact with her entire family in Europe. This act of sharing their bodies through mutual possession in the act of lovemaking creates a balm for the confinement and shame that both Anton and Sophie housed, replacing it with confidence, pleasure, and mutual freedom.

In *The Walnut Tree*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The English Patient*, the characters gain the ability to discover a previously latent part of their identity through reciprocal love. Susan Ellis, in her article “Trade and Power, Money and War: Rethinking Masculinity in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*,” states that Ondaatje creates characters who learn to re-identify themselves through others: “*The English Patient* represent[s] an attempt by Ondaatje to depict the possibility of the truly differentiated self defined through particular relationships to others rather than in isolation from them” (27). This process substantiates the claims in both *The Walnut Tree* and *The Ash Garden* that through mutual possession in lovemaking, the characters instigate growth within themselves and each other, while at the same time discover ways to heal pain, shame, or fear that they could not previously repair on their own.

The relationship between Kip and Hana in *The English Patient* serves not only as sanctuary from the devastation created by warfare, but also as a way for both to begin reassembling themselves after the crippling sorrow each has endured during the war. The two meet in an abandoned villa in Italy where they live largely in isolation from the war with Caravaggio, a friend of Hana's father, and the English patient. When Kip meets Hana, she is completely shattered; she has lost her father, a lover, and an unborn child all because of the war. Similarly, Kip, who has left his family in India to work as a sapper for the British Army, risks his life daily dismantling bombs, one of which has killed his mentor and surrogate father figure, Lord Suffolk. Near the end of the novel, Kip and Hana celebrate several weeks where their reciprocal love provides them with a refuge from the dehumanizing aspects of war; together, they create their own nationless civilization through lovemaking:

There is one month in their lives when Hana and Kip sleep beside each other. A formal celibacy between them. Discovering that in lovemaking there can be a whole civilisation, a whole country ahead of them. The love of the idea of him or her. I don't want to be fucked. I don't want to fuck you. Where he had learned it or she had who knows, in such youth. Perhaps from Caravaggio, who had spoken to her during those evenings about his age, about the tenderness towards every cell in a lover that comes when you discover your mortality. This was, after all, a mortal age. (Ondaatje 225)

The civilization their love creates begins to heal their wounds from the recent past. Moreover, the ecstasy of Hana and Kip's relationship is, according to the narrator, exceptional considering their age; it is based not on sexual pleasure, but on the euphoria that occurs when one human being discovers his or her own vulnerability in another. Like Süssel and her summer lover, and Anton and Sophie, Kip and Hana learn something previously unknown about themselves through their lovemaking. In this relationship, however, what Kip and Hana achieve is an awareness of their mortality – their humanness, a concept much more profound than “the unknown” Süssel discovers, or the confidence and freedom Anton and Sophie experience.

This same passage highlights youth and mortality, two concepts that do not naturally correspond. When describing the depth of Kip and Hana's love, Ondaatje indicates the exceptional quality of their relationship, suggesting that the maturity and wisdom with which they love each other is beyond individuals of their young age: “Where he had learned it or she had who knows, in such youth” (225).

According to Paul Fussell, in *Wartime*, war feeds on the stamina and innocence of youth:

War must rely on the young, for only they have the two things fighting requires: physical stamina and innocence about their own mortality. [. . .] Knowledge will come after a few months, and then they'll be used up and as soldiers virtually useless – scared, cynical, debilitated, unwilling. (52)

Considering Fussell's statement, the exceptional quality of Hana and Kip's love therefore manifests as a result of their wartime experience; they have been “used up”

and “debilitated,” especially in the case of Hana, and consequently their potential for death becomes glaringly apparent. Their relationship is remarkable because in spite of their losses, they manage not only to avoid cynicism and unwillingness, but also to create their own realm of safety and tenderness in the midst of this discovery.

And yet, regardless of the apparent power of reciprocal love in *The English Patient*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The Walnut Tree*, the destructive, unprecedented acts of hate and destruction that saturate the environment during war undermine meanings of humanness, mortality, and morality; and this ultimately cripples the liberating potential of love. Fussell explains how the barbarity of the Second World War challenged the limits of the imagination to such an extent that writers often employ theories of mass corruption in the attempt to comprehend the loss of humanity in war:

[The Second World War] was a savage, insensate affair, barely conceivable to the well-conducted imagination (the main reason there’s so little good writing about it) and hardly approachable without some currently unfashionable theory of human mass insanity and inbuilt, inherited corruption. (132)

Likewise, *The Walnut Tree* implies that the world, once demented by war, subsequently distorts language and erases the freedom created in love. Nearly all its characters recognize that the structures within the prewar world have dissolved into a new order born in the base motives of the Second World War. Within the German hospital for wounded Nazi soldiers where, because of their skills in pharmacy,

Süssel and her father have been forced to work, Süssel describes the deterioration of her society in terms of her gradual dehumanization:

Yet with an end of muscle left in my face, the smile is there. It is there because of the sudden pleasure at the absence of our daily companion: guilt. It just isn't there. Everything seems acceptable, feasible now. The law, the centripetal law of living amongst others, is gone. (Blum 107-8)

Returning to Susan Ellis' description of the world where individuals define themselves through their relationships with others that Ondaatje depicts in *The English Patient*, the world that confines Süssel is precisely the opposite. This absence of guilt, an emotion she associates with proof of one's humanness, characterizes this distorted environment where "the centripetal law of living amongst others" no longer exists.

Süssel claims that guilt has been with her since she entered the hospital, likely because her education enabled her to work in a hospital rather than perish in a death camp. Later in the same passage, she exposes how her decreasing sense of humanity begins to taint her because, in order to survive her conscience, she begins to resign herself to the world that confines her: "And this total absence of guilt gives me a strange freedom: no law!" (Blum 108). Where in the earlier prewar scene with her summer lover she found freedom in their journey into the unknown through lovemaking, here in the hospital, Süssel explains the "strange freedom" that she feels in the absence of guilt. This passage highlights how her language begins to break down because she cannot call what she feels only "freedom;" she needs to qualify

the word with the adjective “strange” in order to clarify that what she feels is not quite freedom, thus depicting what Fussell calls “the inevitable ruin of civilized usages” (10).

As her life in the hospital continues, Süssel explains how the routine they develop nearly re-establishes balance to the lives of all those confined within it. Although her life begins to operate as an altered established order, she recognizes that this order is not completely familiar:

Frontiers blurred: my father was suddenly everyone’s father, a hero of stature. Only once in these bitter months did I hear a wounded officer call him a swinish Jew, for not having rushed to his command. Yet we never stepped out of place. It felt easier now, less menacing, but as Jews we knew better. [. . .] In these barracks now, we almost seemed human. (Blum 121)

Like the inadequacy of the word “freedom” in the above-mentioned passage, in this environment, where it is a *blessing* that her father was called a “swinish Jew” *only once*, the word “human” is so inadequate to describe their altered condition that Blum precedes the noun with the adverb “almost” and the verb “seem” to suggest that their state of being is so distorted it does not quite resemble human.

Consequently, the meaning of love undergoes similar transformations in the hospital that become apparent in the relationship between Süssel and Dr. Bauer, the facilitator at the hospital. In return for her fiancé, Max’s, release from the ghetto, Süssel agrees to engage in a sexual relationship with Dr. Bauer (Blum 75). The language of possession that she invokes to describe her prewar, pre-adult love

relationships continues in the camp; however, by sacrificing herself for Max's release, Süssel becomes a rape victim and a commodity, causing her to lose her identity in their relationship. During the first scene of intercourse between her and Dr. Bauer, his actions are meticulous, devoid of tenderness, and he treats her like a lab specimen rather than a human being:

Taking time, his hands move down, calling for stillness; fingers
entering the hairless sex to find the labia. A sharp stroke, repeated
without gentleness. The thrill of small death. Tears rise to my throat.
[. . .] Out into the night. To the job. Sucking prune pits. Some in my
pocket for my father. Guilt? Avert your eyes, oh Lord! (Blum 112)

Her description of his orgasm, as "the thrill of small death," indicates that her sacrifice, while causing something within her to die, gives Dr. Bauer gratification and power.

Although she not only perceives herself to be conquered by Dr. Bauer but also struggles to suppress her feelings of remorse, she eventually professes to love him, claiming that Dr. Bauer has become her "true" lover. Her continued awareness of his power over her resonates in her recognition that she is completely dependent on him for her safety; she believes he will rescue her from the wrath of the other Jews in the hospital who resent the privileges she receives for sleeping with him:

Machine-gun shots – rhythmical savage dancing – as I emerge at five
o'clock from the barrack of my lover, my true lover now. I love him
furiously. [. . .] Fed and rested, I can love. [. . .] In a deputy role
again, self-imposed, I order everyone around, fearing for my life.

They'll get me somehow. They'll stab or strangle me, they'll poison my tea or catch my foot in an iron trap like a wild animal. And he'll rescue me. Mad, mad. I love him. (Blum 119)

Her comfort in being “in a deputy role again” echoes her earlier contentions to be the sole owner of her life and love; however, the love she professes here grows out of the fear and madness that threatens to consume her in the corrupt world that confines her. Moreover, although she claims that she has rediscovered a position of power, this “deputy role” is still one of subservience; while she gives orders in the hospital, she is completely under the control of the Nazis who imprison her. Her love is polluted; it is not free and experimental as it was in her youth, nor mature and aware of the need for compromise as in her post-war relationship with Max. In the context of this environment, where many of Süssel's neighbours and friends have been destroyed solely on the basis of their Jewishness, “love” and “truth” cease to have the same meaning as they did before the war.

While in her early descriptions of lovemaking between Süssel and her summer lover Blum indicates love's potential to instigate mutual growth between lovers, she extends this idea of birthing to the relationship between Süssel and Dr. Bauer in the hospital where it too is distorted. In Süssel's second description of her intercourse with Dr. Bauer, the “thrill” of death that he receives from his penetration of her vagina in the first scene has now been replaced by the excitement of infusing her seemingly dead body with life:

I [. . .] stretched my limbs long, stiff, free of muscle as he wants them. And was wakened by the sharp parting of my upper thighs and

his brutal entrance. Catatonic as he wants me, the thrill will ring through my life. He came upon my navel, lying in his juice like a newborn from the womb. (Blum 120)

Although Süssel indicates that Dr. Bauer's actions remain violent, she paradoxically suggests that this brutality is associated with the creation of life. But, unlike the mutual growth that Süssel and her summer lover promoted within each other through their consensual lovemaking, the supposed creation that occurs in this scene is tainted considering that it develops out of Dr. Bauer's rape of Süssel both psychologically through their contract and physically during their intercourse.

This idea of a metaphorical birth resulting from their intercourse is reiterated in Dr. Bauer's quasi-confession letter that he conceals in a condom inside the backpack he has prepared for Süssel and her father's escape from the hospital. At the beginning of the letter Dr. Bauer claims that, like Süssel, he is a victim of the war, suggesting that his actions grow out of the corruption created by war: "I did not make that war. I am just like you but on the other side of the barricade. A victim with more luck than you. But it is time for penance, too, a trial of self" (Blum 124). He invokes both the language of possession and the metaphor of birth in the attempt to defend his behaviour:

But you loved me, loved me. You guessed what I was. That I wanted your body and soul, pure as virginal snow. Wanted to be found, rescued, and owned. Life created, exhaled into you almost, by me alone. (Blum 130)

Dr. Bauer's claim that he "wanted to be found, rescued, and owned" echoes the language Süssel uses to characterize her early love encounters; however, earlier in the letter, the doctor admits his real motives behind the relationship: "I had to put an end to your flouting of authority" (Blum 127). This admission, combined with his use of the words "triumph" and "victory" in the above-mentioned passage indicate the height of perversion in the war-dominated world of *The Walnut Tree*. In this seemingly almost human world, domination replaces mutual possession, fear becomes confused with love, and rape is described as life-giving.

The disruptions that Sophie and Anton face in *The Ash Garden* arise largely from the way each not only interprets his or her relationship to the war, but also chooses to cope with his or her own suffering. Sophie and Anton, like Max and Süssel, are to some extent irreparably damaged by the war, which instigates life-long emotional battles within both characters. The war scarred them with

things that would not go away. And they never did. The stupid and meaningless along with the poignant and terrifying. They never seemed willing to leave him, or Sophie. It was as if neither of them had been able to escape the shell of that burnt city. (Bock 104)

In this passage, the narrator suggests that after the bombing of Hiroshima, the "burnt city" which contains suffering, fear, as well as "the stupid and meaningless" aspects of war, creates a prison around their lives that they cannot escape. But the novel complicates this implication through its description of how Anton's perspective and his marriage to Sophie transform after the bomb is dropped.

Although in *The Walnut Tree* Süssel and Max are forcibly confined to the world of war that corrupts the value system they previously upheld, Anton deliberately chooses his role in the Second World War. He leaves his mother and his country with the intention of moving to a place where he can put into action his advanced knowledge of explosives. In order to justify his wilful participation in genocide, he argues that his actions resulted because of the anarchy war creates:

We must not forget the context of a world at war with itself, he often said. We must remember what we were up against. [. . .] These were hard decisions, made by studious and good men mindful of their responsibilities to mankind. Yes, in a perfect world it could have been otherwise, only in a perfect world. (Bock 9)

Even in this early passage, his logic is distorted in the comparison he makes between antithetical concepts: “the context of a world at war” and a “perfect world.” Anton sets up an impossible condition; his implication that an alternative to the atomic bomb could be possible only in “a perfect world,” a world that can never exist, undermines his argument that the bomb became necessary because of the uninhibited, anarchic world created by war.

Throughout the development of Kip and Hana’s relationship in *The English Patient*, the presence of war, awakening the long history of genocide and colonialism, gradually permeates the intense love between them. *The English Patient*, like *The Walnut Tree* and *The Ash Garden*, investigates the question of how war distorts meaning in both language and morality; however, *The English Patient* makes the claim that, although war ruins lives, perverts meaning, and destroys

civilizations, the world out of which war develops is already a place of division, dishonesty, and domination. Caravaggio wonders why Kip and Hana cannot just abandon the villa and ultimately escape the corruption of this “shitty civilized world”:

The correct move is to get on a train, go and have babies together.

[. . .] Why are you not smarter? It’s only the rich who can’t afford to be smart. They’re compromised. They got locked years ago into privilege. [. . . T]hey have to follow the rules of their shitty civilised world. They declare war, they have honour, and they can’t leave.

But you two. We three. We’re free. (Ondaatje 122-3)

Caravaggio advocates the creative potential of love by urging Kip and Hana to desert the villa and procreate. Although he recognizes how the distinctions that characterize the “shitty civilized world” bind individuals within it, he believes that only the rich, the ones who “declare war” and “have honour,” are bound by its rules. But, as the novel unfolds, it becomes clear that Kip and Hana are also restricted and confined by the order of this society.

Like the hospital in *The Walnut Tree*, the world of the villa in *The English Patient* comes into existence because of the war; however, while the hospital is penetrated and perverted from the onset of the war, the villa temporarily serves as a refuge from the corruption both in the war and in the world that preceded it. Even though in the Italian villa, Kip and Hana, along with Caravaggio and Almásy, are literally isolated from the rest of the world, their love does not exist in a vacuum and eventually it too is penetrated by war:

Now, hours later, Kip sits once again in the window alcove. If he could walk the seven yards across the Englishman's room and touch her he would be sane [. . .] But between them lay a treacherous and complex journey. It was a very wide world. (Ondaatje 112-13)

Unlike Dr. Bauer, who participates both in extinguishing Süssel's humanness and in enabling her mental collapse, Hana is the one person who helps Kip remain human and sane. In order to show the enormity of the public world's influence on their lives, the English patient's room becomes a metaphor for the expansiveness of the earth. Kip should physically be able to walk the diameter of the small room; however in this world, Kip and Hana cannot just be boy and girl in love, as Caravaggio implies earlier. In this room, they represent two opposing worlds which contain histories of anguish beyond their control.

Hana and Kip's embodiment of two separate worlds in *The English Patient* offers a new perspective on the familiar proverb "all's fair in love and war," which has been a matter of criticism in other war literature of the twentieth century. In her introduction to *Loving Arms: British Women Writing the Second World War*, Karen Schneider critiques William Broyles, who not only suggests that "women are necessarily and rightfully excluded from the fraternity of war raconteurs" but also relies on this simplistic equation between love and war as an explanation for man's (not humanity's) propensity to conduct war (4):

War, Broyles concludes, is the inevitable result of the "union, deep in the core of our being, between sex and destruction . . . love and death" (61). In one tautological stroke, Broyles claims the discursive

field of war for men, thus silencing women; posits a “natural” adversarial relationship between the sexes, in which women are doomed to defeat; [. . .] At the same time, however, his rather naked version of the quite conventional use of love and war as interchangeable metaphors betrays a conceptual reciprocity between the “politics of gender” and the “politics of war” [. . .] a congruence signified by the punning trope “loving arms.” (5)

This description, according to Schneider, is reductive and incomplete in its implication that issues of gender can be reduced to the language Broyles uses to characterize war, which posits women outside the discourse of war. The relationship between love and war that Ondaatje depicts in *The English Patient*, however, seeks to explore the connection between constructions of gender, race, and identity with the politics of war. Early in the novel, Ondaatje filters the connection between love and war through Caravaggio’s first observation of Hana:

When he had first seen her after all this time she had looked taut, boiled down to just body enough to get her through this efficiently. Her body had been in a war and, as in love, it had used every part of itself. (81)

This equation between seeming opposites is based on the all-encompassing, all-consuming effect of both war and love on one’s body. When Caravaggio sees Hana for the first time since her youth, she has lost everything about herself that suggests pleasure, excess, or desire, leaving behind a corpse-like figure that exists only on the basis of need.

The capacity for love to be war-like is most noticeably depicted through Almásy and Katharine's relationship, which Ondaatje consistently describes using war language and imagery. Shortly before the two lovers end their affair, violence, which develops out of both Katharine's guilt and Almásy's fear of ownership, dictates all aspects of their relationship:

She picks up a cushion and places it onto her lap as a shield against him. "If you make love to me I won't lie about it. If I make love to you I won't lie about it."

She moves the cushion against her heart, as if she would suffocate that part of herself which has broken free.

"What do you hate most?" he asks.

"A lie. And you?"

"Ownership," he says. "When you leave me, forget me."

Her fist swings towards him and hits hard into the bone just below his eye. She dresses and leaves. (152)

While Katharine's conscience prevents her from yielding to vulnerability in love, Almásy completely refuses to expose or to share his privacy with Katharine.

Although their love has the potential, as it does with Kip and Hana, to liberate something within Katharine, she feels the need to "shield" herself from Almásy and likewise stifle parts of herself that their love creates. Moreover, the "war-like" aspects of their relationship extend beyond the figurative war between them that grows out of their unwillingness to enter a terrain of reciprocal vulnerability to a literal battle where Katharine enacts physical violence on Almásy.

This war-like quality of love likewise operates in *The Ash Garden*, where Anton and Sophie's love, although disrupted by war, becomes paralysed by Anton's distorted perspective of his participation in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and his struggle between his resolve and his conscience. After the United States drops the atomic bombs, Anton's guilt repudiates his earlier display of vulnerability during his lovemaking with Sophie, replacing it with an overzealous need to be in control:

She would never grasp the forces behind the events he'd lived through. He was resolved not to let her pity him, or believe that he now regretted the role he had played. He openly admitted that his time with the Manhattan District had been disagreeable. For the first time he had felt fear. But he was back now. This geographical distance had helped provide perspective. It had returned to him a cool head with which the facts might be observed. (Bock 66)

He no longer allows Sophie access to his weaknesses because he is afraid that she may pity him and draw the conclusion that he regrets his past actions. Although he admits to having felt fear, a sign of his defencelessness, he has gained what he calls "perspective" that has eliminated any inclination to regret his decision.

Anton's resolve to defend his participation in the war by extinguishing his vulnerability leads to the eventual deterioration of his marriage. Despite the growth he experienced during the early years with Sophie, where the two lovers "learned to leave their shame behind," in attempting to silence his sense of guilt, he deprives them both of the "liberation" they mutually gained from their lovemaking:

The necessities involved, the weight of responsibility – these were the things his wife was unable to understand. [. . .] While he was facing the unimaginable in Japan, she'd been getting on with her life, playing like an innocent. He had looked to her for strength. He had needed the memory of their life together to keep him focused. But now this normal life repulsed him, and he resented her ability to carry on as she had always done. He did not ask her about her family. Nothing about what she had lost. *It was as if that blast destroyed the ability to see beyond himself.* (Bock 66, emphasis added)

Anton's selfishness not only distorts his ability to sympathize with his wife but also eradicates his logic. He begrudges Sophie continuing her "normal" life while he is suffering in Japan, completely ignoring the reality of her life as a European Jew displaced in the United States because of the Holocaust, which presumably eradicated her entire family. In his postwar life, Anton reassures himself with power - "Power is comfort. Better them than us" - and his belief in his own supremacy obliterates his ability either to empathize with Sophie or to recognize the intense pain she has undergone and continues to suffer (Bock 52). Therefore it is not the war itself, but the *way* he participated in the war by helping to orchestrate the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined with his attempts to justify his actions that have laid down a specific future for him where love is corrupted and natural emotions like empathy, guilt, and remorse cease to exist.

But, Sophie's perspective escalates the disruption Anton's viewpoint causes to his relationship with her; she too believes he is incapable of understanding what

she lost during the war. Once Anton isolates her through his overzealous dedication to his work in the aftermath of the bombing, Sophie begins an affair with Stefano, a Jewish man who, like her, lost contact with his entire family while escaping the Holocaust:

The story of forced deportation was her daily burden, one she had shared with no one before Stefano. That would have cheapened it somehow, she thought, putting it in the ears of strangers. It remained her private story until she met the man who had seen what she had seen, someone who felt the paralysis of the mass European exodus, the scattering of families. (Bock 96)

Before Stefano, she could not reveal her pain to anyone, including her husband, because she had never met anyone who shared her sense of devastation. Although Sophie's separateness from Anton develops in part from their mutual belief that neither person will understand the other's pain, the void between them also increases as a result of her fear.

When Sophie discovers she has lupus and consequently cannot have children, she withholds this information from Anton for ten years because she is afraid of his reaction when he learns that she is sterile (Bock 168). Her concealment completes the transition in their love where the hope they once shared is replaced by apprehension and loss that dominate the rest of their relationship. Their love is transformed into mutual gratitude and they stay together out of duty and necessity rather than love:

It had seemed a whole lifetime, now, this degree of peace they'd finally achieved together [. . .] It was what they had lost that linked them. And the inevitable surge of fear that broke the peaceful silence quickened their sense of duty and reminded them of their perfect vulnerability, like unclaimed orphans able to rely only on each other, for all that had been lost. [. . .] They had almost been happy. (Bock 181)

A chasm in language similar to that which occurred in *The Walnut Tree* underlies this description of the love between Anton and Sophie in *The Ash Garden*.

According to the narrator, they attain a “degree of peace,” which renders them “almost happy;” what they have is an element of peace that resembles happiness, but neither they, nor the narrator, has the language to describe how the war and their reactions to it have created this state of obligation which is “nearly happy” and “sort of peaceful.”

In *The English Patient*, gradually the love between Kip and Hana becomes more like the war-like love of Katharine and Almásy. When Kip hears that Nagasaki and Hiroshima have been destroyed by a white nation, his brother's prophecies about the deception of Europeans become apparent. The explosion transforms both Kip and those around him:

Now his face is a knife. The weeping from shock and horror contained, seeing everything, all those around him, in a different light. [. . .] My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. [. . .] What

have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away, defusing,
limbs of evil. For what? For *this* to happen? (Ondaatje 284-5)

At this point in the novel, the “wide world” has completely invaded the villa and the English patient’s room, transforming Kip into the representative of all the victims of genocide within the “brown races of the world,” whether through imperialism or war. Likewise, Hana, Caravaggio, and Almásy become, in Kip’s eyes, physical manifestations of the agents who caused such destruction, suffering, and annihilation. The disintegration of Hana and Kip’s shared language of love, however, occurs not only through this invasion of the outside world, but also because of a change in Kip’s perspective. Ondaatje uses the metaphor of a knife to explain how the explosion and Kip’s reaction to it transform his face, the symbol of his identity. The image of a knife implies that something within Kip becomes sharp, or clearer, which corresponds to the way his perception of his surroundings, his friends, and his lover simultaneously are transformed in his eyes.

One additional factor that contributes to Kip’s transformation and subsequent inability to forgive Hana is that, when the bomb destroyed their “civilization,” it also annihilated their language, which enabled their mutual recognition of their own mortality in the other. At the end of the novel, Ondaatje illustrates Kip and Hana’s lost language just before Kip leaves the villa:

Kip.

He says nothing, looking through her.

Kip, its *me*. What did we have to do with it?

He is a stone in front of her.

She kneels down to his level and leans forward into him, the side of her head against his chest, holding herself like that.

A beating heart.

When his stillness doesn't alter she rolls back onto her knees.

The Englishman once read me something, from a book: "Love is so small it can tear itself through the eye of a needle."

He leans to his side away from her, his face stopping a few inches from a rain puddle.

A boy and a girl. (Ondaatje 288)

Langer's contention that genocide generates an unbridgeable distance between the world where the suffering occurs and the value system that precedes and is re-established after the atrocity, serves to explain the impossibility of communication between Kip and Hana and Kip's inability to revisit their sanctuary of mutual possession. In this scene, Kip is no longer able to identify part of himself in Hana; where he once discovered his mortality, he sees nothing. Moreover, their bond based on the self-recognition of humanity in the other no longer exists because Kip's understanding of death now includes the process by which white people orchestrate the destruction of "brown" races.

Although Hana attempts to persuade Kip that "love is so small it can tear itself through the eye of a needle," Kip has become stone-like and therefore, like Almásy, unwilling to submit to mutual ownership. In losing his capacity for change and growth, Kirpal Singh is no longer able either to communicate or to live in the civilization he and Hana created through their reciprocal love. Dean Irvine, in his

introduction to *Heresies: The Complete Poems of Anne Wilkinson 1924-1961*, cites the passage from Anne Wilkinson's October 29th, 1951 journal entry as the source for Hana's last words to Kip, which he explains

is far from the original context of Wilkinson's journal entry, but proximate to the broader implication of the passage from which Ondaatje draws his paraphrase: "We should never lose sight of the glorious, untouchable sun that is love. . . . Never let me write a word about love that is not in praise of love. It is only its perversions that sting in my poetry and on my skinny skin. The hare that circles, a vulture beaked and taloned about the dove, poor thing – but beautiful because it is, in the New Testament sense, always poor and therefore able to pass through the eye of a needle." (Irvine 24)

Looking specifically at the line from which Ondaatje constructs Hana's last words, Wilkinson constructs love as "always poor and therefore able to pass through the eye of a needle." Ondaatje makes two significant changes to her statement: he equates love with smallness rather than poverty and he replaces the peaceful term "pass" with the aggressive word "tear," thus suggesting that violent, war-like potential of love that dominated Almásy and Katharine's relationship has now permeated the civilization created by Kip and Hana's love. This substitution therefore illustrates the height of war's capacity to pervert meaning by promoting destruction so powerful that it can eradicate love, the strongest force two human beings can mutually create.

CHAPTER II:
“SHEDDING SKINS”: PRIVACY AND POLITICS IN *THE ENGLISH*
PATIENT, THE ASH GARDEN, AND THE WALNUT TREE.

During peacetime, individuals who have not experienced war often take for granted their ability to withdraw into private, personal spaces impenetrable by the public and political world in which they live. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, privacy includes seclusion, retreat, and the freedom not only to remove oneself from the society of others, but also to have the choice or right to free oneself from interference, intrusion, and public attention (“Privacy”). Privacy in peacetime therefore represents a separate, secretive place available to others only if an individual chooses to expose his or her vulnerability to another. In *Wartime*, an analysis of behaviour in the Second World War, Paul Fussell indicates several aspects of language and meaning that are permanently altered during war:

The damage the war visited upon bodies and buildings, planes and tanks and ships, is obvious. Less obvious is the damage it did to intellect, discrimination, honesty, individuality, complexity, ambiguity, and irony, not to mention privacy and wit. (preface)

He juxtaposes the distinct damage to people, places, and objects with the less apparent, still largely unresolved transformation of meaning within elements of the

private sphere such as intellect, individuality, irony, and privacy. In *The English Patient*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The Walnut Tree*, Ondaatje, Bock, and Blum all investigate the mutilation of privacy and personal identity by war, which, although “less obvious,” is much more complicated to recognize and to repair.

The division between the personal and the political operates within two distinct but connected realms: within the individual, there is a disjunction between one’s social self and one’s essential self that is influenced by a larger binary between society and nature. Elizabeth Kella, in her discussion of *The English Patient*, analyses the battles between social and essential selves, the latter of which finds meaning more within nature than society: “Ondaatje gives imaginative force to a process in which social selves are undone by war to expose vulnerable, essential selves that work to overcome history and to regroup into a more fundamental human community, closer to nature and farther from society” (98). This process of “undoing” requires a recognition of the various constructions within society that characterize one’s “social self,” followed by a subsequent rejection and replacement with a community that defines an individual more in relation to nature than society. This chapter will not only show how the characters’ social identities are constructed from within and in isolation from World War II, but also analyse how they eventually reject or embrace the labels that dictate their public persona.

The Ash Garden and *The English Patient* expose and undermine how public political and external identity is created before and during the Second World War. Although *The Walnut Tree* does not explicitly discuss the construction of public identity, the perpetrators of the Holocaust, which is a dominant theme of the novel,

not only determined their victims on the basis of name and race, two symbols of public identity, but also visually reduced their victims to their public collective identity using what Süssel calls “two triangles of cardboard covered in yellow cloth, juxtaposed. They are to be worn on everything one wears, and are predominant now on my white coat” (Blum 106). According to Fussell, the world of war is predicated on simplification and dehumanization that diminish individuality in the process of labelling:

Looking out upon the wartime world, soldiers and civilians alike reduce it to a simplified sketch featuring a limited series of classifications into which people, in the process dehumanized and deprived of individuality or eccentricity, are fitted. (115)

This tendency to rank, that penetrates both soldier and civilian life by erasing individual characteristics and personality, confines individuals to their conventional functions within society. As Fussell continues, he quotes Elizabeth Bowen’s well-known Second World War novel, *The Heat of the Day*, written in 1948, in order to show how this reduction operates within war literature:

Louie [. . .] receives the classifications determining her vision in 1942 from the newspapers she follows devotedly: “Was she not a worker, a soldier’s lonely wife, a war orphan, a pedestrian, a Londoner, a home and animal-lover, a thinking democrat, a movie-goer, a woman of Britain, a letter-writer, a fuel-saver and a housewife?” (115)

While Louie’s individuality in *The Heat of the Day* is extinguished in positions of worker, soldier’s lonely wife, and fuel-saving housewife, Almásy’s public identity in

The English Patient is likewise compartmentalized, thus preventing the growth of his private relationship with Katharine: “I was the older man. I was the man of the world, who had walked ten years earlier from Dakhla Oasis to the Gilf Kebir, who charted the Farafra, who knew Cyrenaica and had been lost more than twice in the Sand Sea. She met me when I had all those labels” (Ondaatje 230-1). As Almásy later declares, his labels as “the older man,” “the man of the world,” and more seriously his role as “the other man” who disrupts the marriage between Katharine and her prominent, powerful husband, Geoffrey Clifton, develop out of a social law in which neither he nor Katharine believed (Ondaatje 171).

In this rejection of labels, a theme that dominates *The English Patient*, Ondaatje gradually establishes a disjunction between the inaccurate representations of socially defined public labels and the authenticity of individuality that is contained privately. For Hana who, along with her father, Patrick, left her life and her stepmother, Clara, in Canada to participate in the Second World War, all of her symbols of public identity represent her debilitating relationship with death:

After three full days without rest, she finally lay down on the floor beside a mattress where someone lay dead, and slept for twelve hours, closing her eyes against the world around her. When she woke, she picked up a pair of scissors out of the porcelain bowl, leaned over and began to cut her hair, [. . .] the irritation of its presence during the previous days still in her mind – when she had bent forward and her hair had touched blood in a wound. She would

have nothing to link her, to lock her, to death. [. . .] She never looked at herself in mirrors again. (Ondaatje 49-50)

As Susan Ellis points out, Hana deserts not only her nursing unit but all other symbols of her identity that have been tainted by her involvement in war, including her nurse's uniform and her hair (28). Hana's roles as daughter, lover, and nurse, the social classifications that defined her before and during the war, have acquired new meaning that cannot be separated from death. She can no longer observe her reflection in mirrors for the same reason she cannot continue serving as a nurse of wounded soldiers; when she looks at the face of a dying soldier she is reminded of her father or her aborted child, images of herself that have been destroyed by war.

By cutting her hair and refusing to observe her reflection in mirrors, Hana declares that "[she will] not be ordered again or carry out duties for the greater good" (Ondaatje 14). This rejection of "the greater good," which represents the socially prescribed definition of public necessity, symbolizes her denunciation of all her politically defined labels. In abandoning her public self, Hana subsequently agrees to care for only Almásy, an unidentifiable patient who, through fire, has lost his identity:

In the Pisa hospital she had seen the English patient for the first time. A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. [. . .] There was nothing to recognize in him. (Ondaatje 48)

The excess of labels that Almásy laments as disrupting his relationship with Katharine is abolished through the eradication of his identity. His face has been replaced with “an ebony pool” and the scarring his healing has produced creates a barrier around his “raw skin,” which I would argue represents his authentic, private self.

Emiko, in *The Ash Garden*, like Almásy in *The English Patient*, is bound by a series of labels that disrupt her private encounters. When she first entered the United States, her facial scars publicly announced her victimization, thus making her identity dominated by her role as atomic bomb victim. Because her private past is displayed on her face, its disclosure is beyond her control and accessible to the public. But, the appearance of pain on her exterior is not an accurate representation of anguish that plagues her internally:

I’m not sure I suffered from the sense of isolation immigrants are supposedly prone to; maybe I did. [. . .] My hard mask of skin, healed now but still dead to all sensation, never let me forget who I was. On the outside I was different from the woman I knew myself to be, most certainly and clearly different from everyone I saw on a daily basis.

If you passed me on the street, you wouldn’t have looked twice. No, it was what the bomb had done to the inside that marked me for good.

(Bock 200-1)

After multiple plastic surgeries reconstructed her face, although her physical scars become unnoticeable, the wounds to her psyche continue to fester within her body. Bock juxtaposes Emiko’s inner pain with her outward appearance in order to

highlight the inadequate representation of her public identity. Emiko describes her face as a “hard mask,” which implies that her skin, like the hard “protective shell” over Almásy’s burns, is an inauthentic guise that camouflages her true self. Moreover, her paradoxical description of her skin as “healed but dead to all sensation” indicates that, although she is no longer physically wounded, her once living face and public identity have been replaced with a lifeless mask.

In *The Walnut Tree*, Blum indicates the need to protect oneself from public invasion and destruction of privacy through the character of Süssel, who recognizes that while some individuals are overwhelmed by pain, loss, and life, others are capable of maintaining a private sanctuary:

Mother and Felix. Two of a kind. [. . .] Both found the world a piece of theatre. [. . .] Felix and Mother, with their assuredness, their superiority of speech, clothes, poetry, and perfume, and the blueblood money gives, made light of life; their derision an escape. [. . .] Yet when the rules changed they accepted them with the same shrug of the shoulder. [. . .] It was supreme theatre working its way inward. Felix and Mother adopted stances to distance themselves, creating private enclaves, fortresses to withstand onslaught. (Blum 34-5)

Felix, Süssel’s brother, and her mother, see the world as theatre, a statement reminiscent of Jaques’ claim in *As You Like It*: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (2.7.147-8). This notion of “supreme theatre working its way inward” indicates the presence of their assuredness and distance from others both externally and internally. Blum’s invocation of war-imagery in her

description of private places as “fortresses to withstand onslaught” indicates the disjunction between the self that exists privately and the socially-constructed identity by suggesting that the public political world has the potential to invade or attack one’s privacy.

Responding to the devastation that they either witness or contribute to in *The English Patient*, both Hana and Almásy attempt to create for themselves “fortresses” or “private enclaves” that resist their publicly defined selves. According to Elizabeth Kella, the characters in *The English Patient* respond to the devastation of war by retreating into what she calls the “purely private”:

[W]hat keeps these people of different nationalities and backgrounds together is what is initially cast as a human, civilized response to the barbarity of war. [. . .] Stripped of the claptrap of national ideologies, they are able to achieve a new, purer form of identity that allows them to build up a small community outside of pre-existing social networks, [. . .] The need to retreat into the purely private in order to rediscover one’s fundamentally human “character” is understood and respected by the other self-imposed exiles, all of whom are engaged in that process. (92-93)

This realm of “pure” privacy that Kella explains, excludes itself not only from the savage cruelty of war but also from the discrimination contained within the “pre-existing social networks” of national and racial distinctions. *The English Patient* suggests that in the attempt to escape the war-damaged world that confines them, Hana, Caravaggio, Almásy, and Kip explore this uncontaminated clandestine realm

of privacy in search of an essential humanness that finds meaning in isolation from social constructs.

Attempting to escape the detrimental labels that both Hana and Almásy recognize in *The English Patient*, the four characters who take refuge in the Italian villa attempt to retreat into elements of their humanness that have not been penetrated by allegiance to “the greater good.” Although Caravaggio desperately struggles with his perverse need to reveal the English patient’s “true” identity, within the villa that sets itself apart from war-dominated social systems, he cannot “invent a skin” for the patient:

[Caravaggio] watches the man in the bed. He needs to know who this Englishman from the desert is, and reveal him for Hana’s sake. Or perhaps invent a skin for him, the way tannic acid camouflages a burned man’s rawness. Working in Cairo during the early days of the war, he had been trained to invent double agents or phantoms who would take on flesh. [. . .] But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. (Ondaatje 117)

Despite Caravaggio’s skills in fabrication, in this place where all those who occupy it undergo a simultaneous retreat into privacy, he can neither create himself nor invent others according to anything but their essential selves. Both Bock and Ondaatje create a binary between skin, a symbol of an individual’s exterior, socially constructed self, and an inner identity that finds meaning only in authenticity, something separate from the world that created war. Ondaatje constructs this privacy as “rawness,” which not only refers to the patient’s excoriated, bare flesh,

but also suggests that beneath a character's social props, there exists an area of vulnerability and optimism that has not yet been acculturated.

The term "rawness" can also be applied to nature, another force that, at least temporarily, has the capacity to "withstand onslaught" from the public world. Both *The Walnut Tree* and *The English Patient* suggest that the barbarity of World War II cannot be reconciled in nature. Early in *The Walnut Tree*, the Nazis invade the house where Süssel's family lives, killing all the Jews there except her family, who is spared only because the Nazis leave before reaching the uppermost floor of the house. After Lev-Jossel Green and his family are murdered, Süssel and her family attempt to bury their neighbours' bodies in the ground beneath the walnut tree:

And now my father is carrying Lev-Jossel Green's body. Father had to free him first from the entanglement of his youngest child, Lisa. We heaped them under the walnut tree, to let them rest. [. . .] We [. . .] descended into the garden to dig the mass grave under the walnut tree. It was not easy. The tree resisted, its roots rebelled, opposed our shovels and spades, did not want our bodies. [. . .] So we buried them in the open garden, as the faithful walnut tree wouldn't have them between its roots. Blood and walnut don't mingle, it seemed to tell us. (Blum 69-71)

In this scene, nature successfully withstands penetration by the public world when the walnut tree rejects the murdered bodies of the Jews. Blum depicts the tree, an element of nature, as an actual character that opposes not only the murder of this specific family, but also the base motives that drive the Holocaust. Moreover, the

tree's uncompromising refusal to allow the bodies "between its roots," the means through which the tree receives nourishment, indicates nature's ability to maintain itself in a realm impenetrable by the sacrilegious war-contaminated world.

The power and separateness of nature in *The English Patient* is represented by the desert, which, like the walnut tree, operates as a character in the novel.

Ondaatje creates a dichotomy between the war and the desert, the latter able, at least temporarily, to exist in isolation from the war. After Almásy retrieves Katharine's corpse from the Cave of the Swimmers, there were "[t]wo lovers and desert – starlight or moonlight, I don't remember. Everywhere else out there was a war" (174). In his multiple descriptions of the desert, Almásy highlights its privacy and ability to seduce others into a free nationless state:

All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand.[. . .]
Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert" (Ondaatje 139).

As Eleanor Ty indicates, this passage undermines socially created segregations and distinctions, allowing the "usual divisions between subject and other, between one nation and the foreigner, [between] names and origins [to] become unimportant" (13). Moreover, the idea of skin that Ondaatje develops in the scenes previously discussed extends to the desert through the metaphor of clothing, which in this scene represents an individual's national identity. All those in the desert, according to Almásy, willingly renounce their nationhood, including the stereotypes they hold

regarding the cultural heritage of others, thus allowing themselves to be completely enveloped by this nameless, nationless realm of fire and sand.

Ondaatje creates a parallel between the anonymity that defines the desert and the sanctity the villa provides for Kip, Hana, Caravaggio, and Almásy. Although not specifically part of nature, in terms of a binary between society and a world separate from politics, the villa materializes as a zone autonomous from the codes of war:

Then [Kip] is suddenly across the room, the bounce of his sapper lamp all over the place, in this room he has spent a week sweeping of all possible fuzes so it is now cleared. As if the room has now finally emerged from the war, is no longer a zone or territory. (Ondaatje 224)

Ondaatje implies that Kip's removal of the potential physical threats to their safety liberates the villa previously occupied by war. Unlike the desert, which existed as a nationless refuge before the war, the four characters who meet in the villa become acquainted with one another only because of the war and subsequently, by relinquishing their national identities, enable the villa to be transformed from a place defined completely by war to an asylum that finds meaning in solitude and privacy.

And yet, despite the attempts of both individual characters and nature to withstand public penetration, eventually all sanctuaries of privacy in *The English Patient*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The Walnut Tree*, including one's body, one's home, and the natural world, are overpowered by the barbarous world of war. *The Ash Garden* most explicitly portrays the means through which the public world of war invades and consumes the private sanctuaries of Sophie and Anton by showing its ability to saturate their physical bodies. The presence of ash in Anton's mouth,

which first appears once he witnesses the city he helped to eradicate, symbolizes how the public world literally infests Anton's most personal space. Like Sophie, whose sleep is eventually invaded by the public world, the taste of ash awakens Anton's consciousness:

After he got back to Hiroshima the taste of ash began to creep into his mouth while he slept. He awoke in the middle of the night, spitting out the taste even before he was fully conscious. [. . .] But sometimes that flavour hung there long enough for him to watch the sun come up. Other times he would try to isolate a memory of his wife, create a box around her, and slowly the taste would subside. (Bock 60)

Although he initially invokes memories of his love and personal relationship with Sophie to dispel the taste of ash from his mouth, as he ages the only medicine that eases the bitter taste in his mouth are packets of sugar, a remedy his mother used in his childhood to help him forget the discomfort of minor injuries (Bock 93).

Despite Sophie and Anton's attempts to withstand the bombardment of war on their personal lives by "[sitting] in their small apartment, windows curtained against the world, each trying to find what had been lost," eventually their withdrawal is futile (Bock 61-2). The day the United States drops the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, its blast infiltrates their relationship, their apartment, and their bodies, transforming Sophie into a metaphorical victim of the bomb:

She'd been washing dishes when she heard the announcement that a new type of bomb had been detonated over Japan. As soon as the announcer interrupted the program she'd been listening to, [. . .] she

felt herself prepare for the shock. Somehow she knew what was to come, and that her husband had been involved. [. . .] Suddenly she knew that this was what his life had been moving towards, and that this day would hold one part of him hostage for the rest of their lives. (Bock 96-7)

Bock uses language and imagery of war victimization to explain how Sophie and Anton's participation in the war has assaulted their privacy. As if the bomb actually explodes in New York where she is living, Sophie braces herself in preparation for her impending harm. Only minutes after she hears the announcement on the radio, her red butterfly-shaped rash, a mark of lupus, the disease that eventually disintegrates her body, appears for the first time, thus marking her as a victim (Bock 98).

At the same time as her body becomes metaphorically and physically disfigured by the atomic bomb, Sophie also recognizes that her husband has solidified, for the two of them, a future of imprisonment. Although Anton claims that Sophie "could never enter the luminous realm that history had forced him to occupy," she is imprisoned by a disease that becomes increasingly painful not only because of her own inability to acknowledge what she has lost in the war, but also because of Anton's unwillingness to confess his suppressed sense of guilt for his participation in killing and disfiguring thousands of people (Bock 81). As her disease worsens, it becomes more painful, gradually penetrating the little privacy she maintains:

Winching at the sight, she observed the circles on her skin where once there had been a butterfly. But these circles were raised and rough, almost scaly to the touch. It was the pain, though, that got her attention. Years before, there had been none, but this morning the burning had brought her out of sleep. Now there seemed to be small bits of smouldering fire buried deep within, a fire waiting to be released from her body. (Bock 165-6)

In this scene, even Sophie's sleep, the one time when her consciousness and her conscience are subdued, is penetrated by her own and her husband's unresolved link to the Second World War. The description of her body seething with fire waiting to be released from it, although reminiscent of the victims of Hiroshima, also metaphorically represents both Sophie's persistent inability to grieve publicly her private loss and Anton's staunch unwillingness to declare personal responsibility for the devastation he inflicted on others.

Despite the potential for nature, symbolized by the walnut tree in *The Walnut Tree* and the desert in *The English Patient*, to resist the corruption that drives war, eventually it too becomes infested by the depravity of war. In his book on the American Civil War, Bruce Catton explains how people perform acts so base that the matter out of which society develops becomes distorted:

A singular fact about modern war, [. . .] is that it takes charge. Once begun it has to be carried to its conclusion, and carrying it there sets in motion events that may be beyond men's control. Doing what has

to be done to win, men perform acts that alter the very soil in which society's roots are nourished. (Catton qtd in Fussell 9-10)

Catton uses the term 'soil' as a metaphor to describe the ideas, beliefs, and codes on which societies are built; however, both *The Walnut Tree* and *The English Patient* imply that war literally infests the natural world. Although the walnut tree's rejection of the Jewish corpses symbolizes how the Holocaust violates the codes of nature, by the end of the novel, the soil and the air of Europe are poisoned by the war: "My soul had adopted [Prague] and sung its tunes, but its soil is poisoned, as all European soil is, drenched in pain and loss. And I knew I had to go, before I became old" (Blum 179). According to Süssel, European soil, which in this passage represents both the substance out of which civilization emerges and the earth as part of nature, have become saturated by anguish, slaughter, and depravity. In *The English Patient*, Hana too becomes "sick of Europe" and the desert, which represents the expansiveness and power of nature, is gradually transformed into a battlefield containing the staunch nationalism and divisiveness of war (Ondaatje 296).

The same place where Almásy, Madox, and their fellow explorers lived only within privacy, "[having] nothing to do with the world," becomes during the war a place where the privileging of powerful names and nations leads to Katharine's death (Ondaatje 242). Susan Ellis explains the discrepancy between power and anonymity during the scene where Almásy's decision to use his own name to elicit help from the British in the desert leads to Katharine's death in the Cave of the Swimmers:

The power of names is real and has consequences for the characters in the novel, as Almásy's failure to call Katharine by the "right name," that is, her husband's powerful name rather than his own anonymous one, results in his capture and incarceration, and her death alone in the cave when he does not return as promised. (29)

The consequences that Ellis describes manifest out of a society where the public political world has obliterated the separateness of the desert, transforming it into a place where rigid distinctions separate people according to race, name, and nation. In the desert before the war, Almásy and his colleagues willingly relinquished their national identities: "We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states" (Ondaatje 138). But, the desert, which once operated as a private space separate from the political and national distinctions solidified during war, becomes, partially through Almásy's enterprise of mapping the desert, "a place of war" (Ondaatje 260).

The home created in the villa gradually emerges, in spite of its creation solely because of war, as a place where privacy overcomes and subverts the political. But, after the atomic bombs obliterate Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the personal is silenced, its power submerged and overthrown, thus re-inscribing the hierarchies out of which the Second World War developed. As the climax of the novel approaches, the seclusion of the villa gradually disintegrates - "the four of them in private moment [are] flung ironically against this war" – until finally, with the news of the atomic bomb, the war re-invades the villa: "The eyes of the sapper

and the patient meet in this half-dark room crowded now with the world” (Ondaatje 277, 285). When Kip hears that the United States has exploded nuclear weapons in Japan, he both relinquishes his British identity and forsakes the relationships he created with Hana, Almásy, and Caravaggio:

What have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away,
defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For *this* to happen? [. . .]
American, French, I don’t care. When you start bombing the brown
races of the world, you’re an Englishman. You had King Leopold of
Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You
all learned if from the English. (Ondaatje 285-6)

At this point in the novel, the “wide world” has completely invaded the English patient’s room, transforming Kip into a representative of all the victims of genocide within “the brown races of the world,” whether through imperialism or war. Likewise, Hana, Caravaggio, and Almásy become, in Kip’s eyes, physical manifestations of the agents who caused such destruction, suffering, and annihilation.

Scholars and critics of *The English Patient* are largely divided on this climactic scene which leads to the novel’s resolution (or lack thereof)¹; according to

¹ In his article “The Reading Lesson: Michael Ondaatje and the Patients of Desire,” Stephen Scobie summarizes and reacts to the negative responses to Kip’s aggressive reaction at the end of the novel, which Scobie explains, were particularly potent in the United States. Responding to the claims that the ending to the novel is “clumsily handled: too abrupt, too unprepared for, too simplistic in judgement,” Scobie makes the following claim: “So my reaction to the charge that the Hiroshima theme is introduced is twofold: first, I believe that it *is* prepared for, if only subliminally, both by the progression of the dates and by the pervasive imagery of fire; and, second, I feel that it has to be abrupt, it has to have the quality of an intrusion, to shatter the sanctuary the novel has provided for its readers no less than the villa for the characters” (Scobie 94, 96).

Robert Clark, author of “Knotting Desire in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*,” Kip’s wrathful account masks the real reason for his anger:

[Kip’s explanation] is sadly too simplistic. Who first made maps, who taught Leopold or Truman, these are not the issue, nor for that matter would be the huge scale of Japanese racist atrocities in China and other South-East Asian countries from 1937-1945. Kip is suddenly in flight, overmastered by the Law of which he had previously thought himself master. (69)

The brutality and racism of the Japanese across South-East Asia during the Second World War are not, as Clark says, an aspect of Kip’s reaction; however, in his argument that “who taught Leopold or Truman” is an insignificant explanation of Kip’s wrath, Clark fails to recognize the dual identity and the latent struggle between his British allegiance and Indian heritage that festers within Kip throughout the novel.

Kip represents the most complex example of an individual who, although embodying “too many labels” like Almásy and Hana, attempts to embrace his exterior symbols of identity as representations of his inner self. As critics like Eleanor Ty and Elizabeth Kella have pointed out, of the four individuals who find refuge in the villa, Kip is the only character who does not abandon his uniform, a symbol of his affiliation with the British Empire:

When he steps into the seemingly empty villa he is noisy. He is the only one of them who has remained in uniform. Immaculate, buckles shined, the sapper appears out of his tent, his turban symmetrically

layered, the boots clean and banging into the wood or stone floors of the house. (Ondaatje 74)

Through this description of Kip, Ondaatje depicts a physical representation of his dual identity, his Indianness represented by his turban and his Englishness contained in the uniform. Ondaatje is careful not to privilege one “label” of national identity over the other: the buckles of his British uniform are shining immaculately and his turban, a mark of his religious affiliation, is perfectly layered. According to Kella, Kip becomes a mediator who attempts “to negotiate the no-man’s land between the site of (Western) dominance symbolically occupied by the English patient and the site of (Eastern) oppression occupied by his jailed brother” (100). To extend her analysis, in the above-mentioned portrayal of Kip, his body simultaneously becomes the site of Western dominance, contained in uniform, while his turban represents the steadfast refusal of the East to be completely oppressed by the West.

But, regardless of his attempts to embrace the duality of his public identity, Kip, like Hana and Almásy, recognizes the need not only to protect, but also to conceal, elements of his private selfhood. Because of his wartime experience, including his life as a sapper, Kip has learned to equate safety with privacy: “In the years of war he has learned that the only thing safe is himself” (Ondaatje 218). Furthermore, he extends this notion of privacy to his personal relationship with Hana, with whom he maintains a division between his private self and his public identity: “But the sapper’s body allows nothing to enter him that comes from another world. A boy in love who will not eat the food she gathers, who does not need or want the drug in a needle she could slide into his arm” (Ondaatje 126).

Although he will share his bed with Hana and display marks of British identity on his exterior, he will not allow anything foreign to penetrate his body.

In combination with the rules of privacy Kip constructs for himself and the dual identity he displays on his body, Ondaatje lays the foundation for Kip's transformation at the end of the novel through his descriptions of his brother, who abhors Britain and defies tradition by refusing to serve the British army. During a private moment where Kip and Hana wash their hair, he shares information about his family and his jailed brother:

“Ah, but my brother thinks me a fool for trusting the English. [. . .]

One day, he says, I will open my eyes. Asia is still not a free continent, and he is appalled at how we throw ourselves into English wars. It is a battle of opinion we have always had. ‘One day you will open your eyes,’ my brother keeps saying.” The sapper says this, his eyes closed tight, mocking the metaphor. (Ondaatje 217)

Kip's “explosion” at the end of the novel and subsequent renunciation of all things connected to “Britishness” fulfills his brother's prophecy. His tightly closed eyes in this scene are replaced with a view of others illuminated by the atomic bomb blasts: “The weeping from shock and horror contained, seeing everything, all those around him, in a different light” (Ondaatje 284). Withdrawing from the villa, Kip confines himself within a restricted realm of privacy unlike the nationless sanctity he discovered with Hana and the others in the villa. After returning to India, although he still thinks of Hana and shares a strange, psychic connection with her, he lives in

a family where he exposes his personal self only to others of the same race: “all of their hands are brown” (Ondaatje 301).

Hana’s letter to Clara at the end of *The English Patient* isolates the irreparable chasm war creates between the personal realm of privacy and the public world of politics. Kip remains a victim of this everlasting war between personal and public that, according to Hana, has been solidified by the United States dropping the atomic bombs on Japan:

The year is 194-. What? For a second I forget. But I know the month and the day. One day after we heard the bombs were dropped in Japan, so it feels like the end of the world. From now on I believe the personal will forever be at war with the public. If we can rationalize this we can rationalize anything. (Ondaatje 292)

This description reiterates Paul Fussell’s insistence on the “less obvious” damage that war visits on emotion, human relationships, and privacy. Moreover, Hana indicates the impossibility of “rationalizing” or using reason or logic to explain either the incomprehensible unprecedented violence out of which the atomic bomb and its victims developed or the ways in which others respond to this new, never-ending war that has the ability not only to penetrate individual privacy, but also to infest nature and the “soil” out of which society is cultivated.

CHAPTER III:
IN SEARCH OF ONE’S OWN COMPANY IN *THE WALNUT TREE*, *THE*
***ASH GARDEN*, AND *THE ENGLISH PATIENT*.**

Of war and peace the truth just twists. – Bob Dylan

The unprecedented destruction that war enacts on individuals, relationships, and communities, combined with its physical obliteration of body, home, and place, creates a sorrow so debilitating that it leaves its victims in a state of vulnerability and helplessness, where all the social structures they previously accepted lose all meaning. In *The English Patient*, Caravaggio recognizes this all-consuming grief in Hana, who, because of the war, has lost her father, her lover, and her unborn child:

Caravaggio came into the kitchen to find Hana sitting hunched over the table. He could not see her face or her arms tucked in under her body, only the naked back, the bare shoulders. She was not still or asleep. With each shudder her head shook over the table. [. . .] She began to moan so the sound would be a barrier between them, a river across which she could not be reached. He was uncertain at first about touching her in her nakedness, said “Hana,” and then lay his bandaged hand on her shoulder. She did not stop shaking. The

deepest sorrow, he thought. Where the only way to survive is to excavate everything. (Ondaatje 44)

To describe the process of initiating survival, Ondaatje uses the term “excavate,” which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means “to uncover or lay bare by digging; to unearth” (“Excavate”). In this scene, he also emphasizes Hana’s vulnerability and authenticity through his simultaneous description of her naked, bare body and her separateness from others, which he depicts using the metaphor of a river that her moaning, a symbol of her grief, creates between her and Caravaggio. In this state of isolation and intense sorrow, survival, according to Caravaggio, is possible only by unearthing everything, and digging beneath all the structures one accepted without question before the war, in order to expose the authentic self that exists beneath one’s social props. The characters in *The Walnut Tree*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The English Patient* therefore search for a constant, something unscathed by war, from which they can begin to rebuild a basis for continuing their lives in the aftermath of their emotional wounds.

By exploding what Martha Blum calls “the centripetal law of living amongst others,” truth, although difficult to find and containing separate personal meaning for each individual, becomes essential for survival (108). In *The English Patient*, the characters are all forced into an awareness of their mortality through their wartime experiences and likewise respond to their trauma by retreating into the private realm of their personal selves. It is from within this space that authenticity emerges, establishing their connectedness to others: “There was no defence but to look for the truth in others” (Ondaatje 117). War generates vulnerability by eradicating all the

comforts that the characters in *The English Patient*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The Walnut Tree* enjoyed before the war; therefore, in order to rebuild a basis on which to continue their lives, their only means of defence is to find and redefine truth. According to Elizabeth Bowen, World War II initiated a widespread search for certainty, a concept that she and others simultaneously wanted and feared:

World War II [. . .] (and) its “glaring ordeal” seemed “to seek out and demand truth” (“On Writing” 11). Like the characters in *The Heat of the Day*, though, [Bowen] “at once dread[ed] and desire[d]” that truth, which murkily emerges from a discourse double voiced in the extreme (11). (Schneider 108)

This ambivalence that Schneider identifies in Bowen occurs because, although truth becomes one of the few things from which one can attain certainty, it also requires an individual not only to embrace what gives his or her life meaning in the midst of destruction but also to face the reality of war, which includes betrayal, terror, and genocide.

Like the binaries personal and political, essential self and social identity, and society and nature, which were discussed in Chapter II, regarding truth and survival, there is also a disjunction between the past and the future. In all three works, hope for a better future is not a viable means by which any of the protagonists can give meaning to their lives. Philip Larkin, who entered Oxford University in England at the beginning of World War II, explains how in the midst of an atmosphere where the only thing certain is death, any attempt to imagine one’s life or opportunities after the war was a “ludicrous waste of time”:

And Philip Larkin, entering Oxford at the beginning of the war, found in himself [. . .] an “almost-complete suspension of concern for the future. . . . National affairs were going so badly, and a victorious peace was clearly so far off, that effort expended on one’s post-war prospects could hardly seem anything but a ludicrous waste of time.” (Larkin quoted in Fussell 55)

For Larkin, the future became so abstract that one could not even imagine his or her future let alone find within it anything constant. In response to the psychological trauma they suffer during war, the characters created by Ondaatje, Bock, and Blum look to the past, namely their childhood, in the attempt to find meaning in the midst of an environment where nearly everything is uncertain.

As mentioned in Chapter I, in *The English Patient* Kip and Hana, through their lovemaking, create a civilization, or a refuge, from the extensive destruction that has dominated their lives. Both characters respond to their losses by searching for a sense of comfort and peace within one another. At the end of Chapter VIII, entitled “The Holy Forest,” Kip recognizes that, as a child, his Ayah provided him with comfort and consolation: “All comfort and peace during childhood, Kip remembered, had come from [his Ayah], never from the mother he loved or from his brother or father, whom he played with” (Ondaatje 225-6). He remembers only one time, during the death of her mother, when he was able to reciprocate the tenderness his Ayah afforded him:

Only once did he feel he had given her back any comfort, though she already understood his love for her. When her mother died he had

crept into her room and held her suddenly old body. In silence he lay beside her mourning in her small servant's room where she wept wildly and formally. [. . .] He was behind her hunched-over body, his nine-year-old hands on her shoulders, and when she was finally still, just now and then a shudder, he began to scratch her through the sari, then pulled it aside and scratched her skin – as Hana now received this tender art, his nails against the million cells of her skin, in his tent, in 1945, where their continents met in a hill town. (Ondaatje 226)

Kip and Hana's relationship reaches its height when Kip compares the tenderness he shares with Hana to the love he had for his Ayah. His experience with the war has rendered him so vulnerable and defenceless that he responds with the uncorrupted empathy of a child. Kip's only protection against both the grief he experiences and the sorrow he observes in Hana is to return to a time in his past when he felt completely safe, and he subsequently attempts to share this sanctuary with her. This innocent child-like action enables their "continents" to intersect and the two of them to live, although temporarily, in a state without nations or borders.

Although Max and Anton occupy opposing positions of victim and aggressor in *The Walnut Tree* and *The Ash Garden* respectively, in the attempt to cope with the trauma they each suffer because of the war, each man in adulthood reverts to a childhood memory and remedy in the attempt to alleviate his own sorrow. After the atomic bombs are dropped, Anton travels to Japan in order to witness first-hand the

mutilation that he helped to create. During his time in Hiroshima, his mouth fills with a bitter taste of ash that stays with him even in his old age:

Sometimes the ash appeared in his mouth while he helped out the Japanese doctor. [. . .] He asked some of the other men if they tasted the grey cloud that seemed to hang in the air, and most shook their heads and shrugged. Even though each of them had spoken about the smell of burnt flesh that never seemed to go away. (Bock 60-1)

Although the Americans who are with Anton in Japan recognize the smell of burnt flesh that saturates the air, it is only Anton whose body is inhabited by the residue from the bomb, which suggests that the ash is a manifestation of his guilt. In the attempt to live with this bitterness that invades his sense of taste, Anton searches for comfort in a childhood remedy:

He started walking around with packets of sugar in his pockets, lifted every morning from the PX. He found it overcame the taste, if only temporarily, like perfume in a slaughterhouse. He'd drain a sleeve into his mouth, then feel the ache rise in his teeth. But the taste would disappear. It was something he remembered from his youth, the treatment his mother prescribed for skinned knees and cut elbows, a childish balm transferred to adult life. (Bock 61)

Like Max, whose memory of sugar transports him to a state of innocence bordering on naiveté, Anton resorts to a remedy that relies on inexperience; however, the main reason the sugar packets cured Anton's pain as a child was because the remedy depended on his short attention span to induce forgetfulness. This ailment, which

worsens with his increased attempts to convince himself and others that his actions during the war were justified, likewise causes him to resort to a cure that relies on his ability to deceive himself. But, although his attempt to transfer “a childish balm [. . .] to adult life” indicates how he is trapped in self-deception, this helpless attempt to soothe his psychological turmoil also emphasizes his humanness.

Although Anton’s torture is a purely emotional self-imposed ailment that develops out of his unwillingness to regret his past decisions, Max has no control over the cause of his anguish. He is nearly destroyed by the harsh Ukrainian winter and debilitating conditions that he, because of his Jewish heritage, is forced to endure. Struggling to preserve his mental and physical health while imprisoned in a Ukrainian concentration camp, Max receives consolation from the memory of his grandfather:

It is the winter of 1942-43. Dreams are far away, love is in a potato peel. [. . .] Who has a brother here, I wonder, or a sweet Jewish grandfather? My grandfather sometimes appears, comes to me, no mistaking his presence, it is he. When I am at the end of my strength, towards the evening, he speaks to me: *All work is futile, do it without thinking. Just carry those wagons from one silly spot to the other. All is senseless, imposed by robots for their own might. There is only God to serve.* (Blum 115)

Max is confined by a world that has eradicated brotherhood: “It was everyone for himself, kindness not invented yet or killed by the system” (Blum 115). The voice of his grandfather not only urges him to recognize the futility and meaninglessness

of his physical work and focus on his love for God but also reminds him that the people who have created his situation are inhumane.

But, Max's faith can neither preserve his physical health nor prevent his emotional collapse. At this point of near submission, it is a simple, specific fragment of his past that allows Max to persevere:

But it is December, 1942, and his *Mordechai, think of God*, does not keep my fingers from frost. One after the other they turn as white as the snowfields around us, and I lose control of the shovel. It falls from my hands and I fall next to it. I could cry then, and my grandfather speaks to me, consolingly: *Here is a cube of sugar. I saved it from my tea, God has chosen you. Sleep my Bubbale, my darling.* (Blum 115)

This memory embodies the antithesis of the concentration camp; in a place created out of cruelty, Max remembers his grandfather's love and the innocence he himself embodied as a child. At the time of his memory, something as small as a cube of sugar given by his grandfather convinced Max of God's love for him. And, despite the misery that he is currently living through, he allows this recollection of his grandfather, and his child-like ability to trust, to lift him beyond his agony.

As adults, Max and Süssel's shared past and childhood allow them in adulthood to reciprocate healing in each other from the trauma they each suffered during the war. In *The Walnut Tree*, Blum allegorizes Max and Süssel's anguish through the legend of Master Manole, a story that Süssel learned from her family's Romanian servant Ileana. When Süssel was a young girl, Ileana used to reward her

good behaviour with the story of a Christian master stone-mason, Manole, whom God commands to build him “*a house of prayer, contemplation, and learning, [. . .] A home of glory*” (Blum 2). In the process of building this “house of glory,” God asks Manole to carry out the greatest sacrifice by surrendering what he loves most to God:

He heard the command, the unmistakable Voice. God asked of him the highest sacrifice: *Take what you love best and offer it to Me. Take what you love best to the monastery and wall in what you love. With your skilled hands, Master Manole, put stone on stone until the wall is closed around what you love. Then the house of God will be built. Then I will know my true servant.* (Blum 3)

In accordance with God’s request, Manole takes his beautiful wife, whom he adores, and proceeds to imprison her within the side chapel of the monastery. At this point in the story, the five-year-old Süssel objects to Manole’s decision, ordering Ileana to release Manole’s wife: “‘Let her out,’ I shout. ‘Let her out, Ileana! I don’t want her in there, she has no air, she can’t breathe! I don’t care about your terrible monastery, let her out, Ileana’” (Blum 3-4).

Until the end of the novel, the legend of Manole operates like a curse that occupies the consciences of both Süssel and Max. After losing his wife, Helen, Max, at the point of complete emotional collapse, recalls and rejects the story of Manole as an explanation for his suffering:

And you, Süssel, wondered about it too, even as a five-year-old, when Ileana took you in her arms and told you this ancient tale.

What does it cost to build a house of glory? [. . .] Master Manole had it easy. He had command, the will and madness for sacrifice. I am not he. I am terrified of that price. I will not give precious life; it isn't mine to give. It has to be wrenched from me. My beloved grandfather was taken. On what altar? you would say. Master Manole's altar is not mine. I look into the word of God to build that house for Him. But what will it cost? The walls have crumbled, my Lutheran mother lies on the ground, so do my father and his people. (Blum 191)

Both Max and Süssel view their suffering according to this "price" of "building a house of glory," which throughout the novel refers to the glory of God: "the final cause of creation . . . the highest moral aim of intelligent beings" ("glory"). In this passage, Max struggles with his relationship to God on the basis that he is *not* Manole and therefore has neither the capacity nor the desire to give whatever God asks of him. Despite Max's attempt to follow God's teaching and look "into the word of God to build that house for Him," he has reached the limit of his ability to endure suffering.

Although both Max and Süssel recognize the power the legend of Manole has over their lives, because they have each allowed their lives to be governed by opposing versions of truth, their reconciliation at the end of the novel requires compromise, specifically on the part of Max, who must "come to terms with Süssel's kind of truth" (Blum 315). Max is highly skilled in mathematics, and thus superstition and imagination, although compelling, are exceedingly difficult to

embrace. Shortly after Süssel secures his release from the ghetto, Max's scientific mind resists his attempt to escape reality through his imagination:

Now I collect a few of the chestnuts in my left pocket – the right one is for Süssel's marbled wedding ring. Chestnuts are my amulets. I touch their silky surfaces, dipping into hollows and rising to an uneven round, a sweet familiar superstition. I rejoice in it, ashamed as well, for my scientific mind does not allow it easily. It mocks and disdains. (Blum 95)

On the contrary, Süssel's version of truth is characterized by metaphor and grounded in faith. Returning from the ghetto accompanied by two men from the Schutzstaffel, she finds consolation within herself despite the inhumanity that confines her: "I'm made to hasten my step. *March*, the two SS men say, *march*. The dogs look more human. But solace returns with oblivion, prayer, and past" (Blum 76).

The binary Blum establishes between the ideals that Süssel and Max each upholds is stereotypical of conventional Western notions of the masculine tendency toward logic and reason, and the feminine reliance on emotion. But, despite this unoriginal discrepancy between Süssel's and Max's ways of viewing the world, their resolution at the end of the novel is interesting, particularly *why* they are able to uncover a shared sense of meaning that finally frees them from the legend of Manole and likewise abates their individual suffering. After Nestor, Grisha, and Elizabeth all leave Max and Süssel's Saskatoon home in search of their own futures, Max and Süssel are at last able to reconcile their recent past with a return to their adolescence:

They talked little, as if afraid of disturbing an emerging truth. [. . .]

Max took her hand in his and they found their teenage rhythm again, as if a life had not happened in between. And “Manole” abated. The feeling of loss, failure, and the price to be paid. (Blum 314)

The strength of their love during adolescence provides them with a foundation for their relationship in adulthood. Their return to “teenage rhythm” releases the hold of “Manole” and their feeling of being tested by God, which allows them to move into the same bedroom at the end of the novel:

“Dear Süssel, is it possible? How do we remember? How is it possible that a legend can have that kind of power over you!” [. . .]

“That it can’t be predicted or controlled, that it can persist so unfailingly in the dark of your soul! It shakes me. It is hard to believe.” Max smiled at being forced to come to terms with Süssel’s kind of truth. But in his logical and honest fashion, he conceded to her, “I lay my weapons at your feet,” in the idiom of Czernowitz.

(Blum 315-16)

In order for Max and Süssel to return to the past they once shared, he must accept her kind of truth, a mode of belief based on “oblivion, prayer, and past,” that allows them both finally to free themselves and one another from the fear and entrapment the legend of Manole instilled within them since childhood.

Unlike Max and Süssel, who achieve reciprocal love and survival through their ability to base a future on the love they shared as teenagers, Sophie and Anton’s inability to make peace with their pasts deprives them of an emotionally

prosperous future. Because neither Sophie nor Anton is able to be honest with herself or himself, they cannot rediscover the mutual freedom, described in Chapter I, that they once shared as newlyweds. Their common inability to understand either what they lost or what they forced others to lose prevents them from enjoying the happiness they initiated within one another at the beginning of the war. Sophie's struggle to enter her past while on her deathbed causes her to recognize the happiness she sacrificed by refusing to acknowledge what the war, including Anton's self-absorption and lack of empathy for her emotional trauma, forced her to lose. In response to her impending death, Sophie becomes so vulnerable and helpless that she can respond only by attempting to salvage the last vestige of comfort from her hazily remembered childhood:

She had been required [. . .] to reach into the dark past and bring up into the light the ghosting memories and half-remembered *Yiskadel v'yiskadash sh'may rabbah*, chanted now, near the end of her life, with an unsure child-like pronunciation. To surrender so much at such an early age, when so little besides loss and upheaval seemed definite, had established an absence in her life that remained to this day. (Bock 225)

Like Elizabeth Bowen, who explained how in the aftermath of World War II, she “at once dread[ed] and desire[d]” truth, at the end of her life, Sophie recognizes the paradoxical relationship to truth that war forced upon her. As a young woman, Sophie did not know how to re-establish meaning in a world where the only things certain were emptiness and destruction. Now, when she has lost all opportunities to

cope with this deficiency, she recognizes that the uncertainty the war fashioned within both her and Anton consumed her and prevented her from achieving any real sense of happiness.

The main reason why Sophie could not fill the void her loss has created is because she gave up her relationship with Stefano, a man who understood her pain and urged her to search for a way to fill the meaninglessness that consumed her, out of loyalty to her husband Anton who, consumed by his own sense of guilt, could not even acknowledge what she lost:

She had not talked about her family with [Anton], not once. She knew that he was incapable of listening at first, and that she would not be able to coax him with mention of her own needs. But she had not expected anger. She had not expected impatience. Silence, yes. But not that she would be expected to bear the consequences of his time at the war. (Bock 66-7)

Anton's experiences during the war forces Sophie into the role of a double victim; that is, she is plagued not only by the sense of misery she feels at the loss of contact with her family through the Holocaust, but also by Anton's unwillingness either to acknowledge his responsibility for the eradication of people and places with the atomic bomb or to share his emotional turmoil with his wife. As mentioned in Chapter II, Anton's wartime experiences force him into a world of extreme privacy, a state of self-centredness, which manifests itself in the form of anger and impatience with Sophie: "[H]e resented her ability to carry on as she had always

done. He did not ask her about her family. Nothing about what she had lost. It was as if that blast had destroyed the ability to see beyond himself” (Bock 66).

Anton’s resolute unwillingness to examine honestly his subconscious reaction to his participation in the annihilation of thousands of Japanese during the Second World War denies him fulfillment and prosperity throughout the remainder of his adult life. Several years after the war, Anton is confined by his past when Sophie’s illness and her failure to disclose the details to him deprives him of children, which he believed would be his means of resolution in the future. Although Anton persists in his lack of remorse for his actions, he hopes that through his future with Sophie, namely children, he will be able to create “something better and more permanent [. . .] than the sad legacy of his deeds” (Bock 167):

In one [of his letters to Sophie] he wrote of his desire to have children, which was the single true gift they could give each other, something he’d never really considered before seeing the face of so much suffering and death. (Bock 55)

Anton’s exposure to the devastation in Japan presents him with an awareness of his own mortality that causes him to think about how his life will be remembered by others. According to *The English Patient*, age, or a heightened understanding of death which ages people during war, instigates anxiety about legacy and the future within its victims: “When we are young we do not look into mirrors. It is when we are old, concerned with our name, our legend, what our lives will mean to the future. We become vain with the names we own” (Ondaatje 141-2). If Anton were remembered only for his actions during the Second World War, the “names he

owned,” like “atomic bomb developer,” would associate him with only murder, destruction, and suffering. His desire to have children, to whom he refers to as “the single true gift” he and Sophie can give one another, indicates a lack of meaning in his life and a subsequent need to produce something significant in the aftermath of the emptiness and destruction he forced on others.

Once Anton realizes that he cannot relieve his sense of guilt through children and fatherhood, he focuses his energy on justifying his past to future generations, not only through his obsessive dedication to his teaching but more importantly with his fanatical intrusion into Emiko’s life and his need for her to know the details of his involvement in her life after the atomic bomb. At the end of the novel, when Anton finally informs Emiko that he hand-picked her to be sent for surgery in America, he tells her, not, as he claims, because he believes she deserves to know, but because her awareness of his participation in her life gives significance to his actions:

“I gave you freedom, Emiko.”

“This is *your* life,” she said. [. . .] “You went back to Japan to ease your conscience. To help one of thousands. Helping *one* doesn’t erase the memory of the thousands you didn’t.”

“No,” he said. “But it is one person.”

“That person didn’t want your help!”

“I am telling you the truth. It is a certain truth, naturally. I thought you would want to know the hand that has directed your fate. I wanted you to stop wondering. That is my gift to you.” (Bock 263)

His reference to his declaration as “a certain truth” reiterates the way in which the war disrupts all sense of meaning, including its creation of widespread doubt. In giving her the “facts” about her past and his involvement in what she became, Anton believes he will likewise acquire the sense of truth or meaning for which he has been searching since the war.

Although Anton seeks to resolve his past by declaring his role in shaping Emiko’s reconstruction, he remains steadfast in his unwillingness to take personal responsibility for his past decisions. He identifies concern for Emiko’s emotional well-being as his motive for informing her of his participation in her past; however, Anton’s explanation of why he tells Emiko reveals the true reason why he discloses the information to her:

“This was my opportunity to give something back. So much had been taken from you. I needed to help any way I could. Only a small gesture, a moment of grace. You would deny me that? You would have been left back there, don’t you see? Your life would be different. You would be horribly scarred. Still that little girl. Forever that little girl.” (Bock 262)

Anton’s usurpation of Emiko’s life becomes his last, frantic attempt not only to leave a legacy based in something other than devastation but also to make amends, at least to some extent, for his actions. But, in this defence of his actions, Anton resorts to the passive voice – “so much had been taken from you” – thus refusing to accept any personal responsibility for her loss, even though he claims that his ability to help her endows him with “a moment of grace.” Anton therefore wants to free

himself from the guilt, or the “taste of ash” with which his past infests him, without either having to admit any personal responsibility or declaring any feelings of regret or remorse.

Despite Anton’s attempt to resolve his past with his role as the saviour of Emiko’s future, his self-righteous claims to her that “who you are is because of me” are stifled by his dream at the end of the novel. After Sophie’s death, Anton, consumed by the guilt of helping her to die, seeks consolation and justification for his actions from Emiko:

He wanted to hear Emiko say, *Yes, in such a case . . . There are limits to the suffering we should endure. When responsibility falls to the living to help those who can no longer . . .*

But instead: “I’m sorry.” Only that.

So this was the mystery, Emiko thought. Here was a man guilty of helping his wife end her suffering. A terrible thing, yes, that blood on your hands. (Bock 250)

But, Anton’s culpability in this scene is misplaced; although he seeks justification for respecting Sophie’s wishes at the end of her life, the actual source of his compunction is his subconscious realization that he killed Sophie long before her actual death. Even after Anton declares his contribution to Emiko’s life, the final image of him in the novel is one of never-ending psychological unrest.

In Bock’s last description of Anton, he is confined in a dream that represents the attempt of his subconscious self to make him recognize the true source of the guilt he feels at Sophie’s death. While Anton dedicated himself to justifying his and

others' support of the atomic bomb and likewise sought pardon for his behaviour through his aid of Emiko, he failed to acknowledge the bomb victim for whom he alone was responsible - his wife Sophie:

He opened the door and nodded to the lady officer, who was dressed in military gear, gas-mask, khakis, boots. [. . .] At this early hour, immensely tired, he was aware only of something peculiar here – something unwelcome and beckoning. [. . .] She took him by the shoulder, led him upstairs to the bedroom and turned back the white sheet on the bed. Though the corpse he saw was scarred and burnt, he recognized it as his wife's. Where it was not charred black, along the body's right side, a mass of open sores, red and oozing, bubbled as if possessed of a life of their own. The woman in the military garb pointed at the plastic bottle in his hand, which he raised in the air above the corpse of his burnt wife, then squeezed slowly and watched as the oil dripped over her body. (Bock 270)

The military garb of the woman who leads Anton to Sophie's corpse in the dream represents the connection between Sophie's death and Anton's actions in the Second World War. Bock's description of her body as a charred, black mass of open wounds, mirrors descriptions of the actual victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki:

The bodies were completely naked and scorched black, and the buttocks of each rested in a great pool of feces. [. . .] The hair on their heads and elsewhere was burned away, and it was only by the

contours – of the breasts, for example – that I could distinguish man and woman. (Ibuse 99)

The oil Anton drips over Sophie's body, which Bock later identifies as coconut oil, reiterates an earlier scene in the novel when Anton witnesses atomic bomb testing in Santa Fe, New Mexico:

Early one morning, the sweet coconut taste of the flavoured oil he'd massaged into his skin invaded him mouth and crept up the length of his tongue as he watched the sky through the bunker's observation window. [. . .] This protective position was imperative, they said, but no one paid attention. [. . .] He leaned forward against a concrete wall, rubbing more of the oil onto the backs of his hands and on the front of his neck. [. . .] Such an odd day for suntan lotion, he thought. (Bock 47)

The repeated presence of coconut oil in Anton's dream therefore illustrates his futile attempt to protect Sophie's already deceased body from the bomb. Sadly, this realization, which comes only in the form of a dream, occurs after Sophie has already died and Anton has no means of undoing the destruction that he enacted upon her.

Like Sophie and Anton, neither Kip nor Hana, despite the freedom they allow themselves to share during their time together in the villa before the atomic bomb, is willing to render him - or herself completely vulnerable to the other, which subsequently prevents them from surviving together in the future. Although as mentioned in Chapter I, they eventually begin to share, through their lovemaking,

fragments of their pasts, which results in the creation of what Ondaatje calls a civilization, the bomb undermines the degree of truth they mutually created. But, their tragic separation at the end of the novel is foreshadowed by unwillingness on the part of both Kip and Hana, to reveal weakness to the other:

He wanted Hana's shoulder, wanted to place his palm over it as he had done in the sunlight when she slept and he had lain there as if in someone's rifle sights, awkward with her. [. . .] He did not want comfort but he wanted to surround the girl with it, to guide her from this room. He refused to believe in his own weaknesses, and with her he had not found a weakness to fit himself against. Neither of them was willing to reveal such a possibility to the other. (Ondaatje 114)

Kip recognizes Hana's sorrow and the extent to which it debilitates her. His love for her and his capacity for empathy instigates his desire to provide her with a sense of comfort; however, much as Hana is obsessively dedicated to the Englishman, which allows her to "turn away from being an adult" or escape her misery, Kip supplants his own grief and vulnerability in his concern for Hana because he can neither accept, nor acknowledge, his own capacity for suffering (Ondaatje 52).

The first two chapters of this thesis explained in great detail Kip's reaction to the atomic bomb and his subsequent rejection of both his love for Hana and his previous acceptance of Western customs and culture. After Kip becomes aware of the atomic bomb blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he and Hana can no longer reciprocate survival in one another because, unlike Max and Süssel, they do not share either a history of hurt or a common past from within which they can find a

means to heal themselves and each other. On the contrary, the grief and betrayal Kip experiences upon hearing that a white nation was responsible for the obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki causes both him and Hana to scramble in search of something certain, meaningful, and unscathed by war:

He went south, avoiding Florence completely. Through Greve, across to Montevarchi and Ambra, small towns ignored by war and invasion. Then, as the new hills appeared, he began to climb the spine of them towards Cortona. He was travelling against the direction of the invasion, as if rewinding the spool of war, the route no longer tense with military. He took only roads he knew, seeing the familiar castle towns from a distance. He lay static on the Triumph as it burned under him in its tear along the country roads. He carried little, all weapons left behind. The bike hurled through each village, not slowing for town or memory of war. (Ondaatje 290)

Kip's rejection of everything that war created includes his life in the villa and his love for Hana, which would not have existed without the war. As Chapter II explains, at the end of the novel, Kip retreats into permanence, submerging himself in anything that he can separate from the war. He creates for himself a life based in the familiar traditions and routines he learned in his childhood: "At this table all of their hands are brown. They move with ease in their customs and habits" (Ondaatje 301). After the war obliterates the balance that he once sustained between his Eastern and Western influences, Kip recovers personal peace in the company of others who share his culture, his race, and his past.

Although scholars and critics of *The English Patient* have given considerable attention to Kip, his reaction to the atomic bomb, and the political implications of his decision to leave Hana at the end of the novel, Hana has been largely ignored in criticism on *The English Patient*, even though she comes the closest of all characters in the novel to achieving the state of nationlessness that Almásy strives for until his death. After Kip leaves her and Almásy dies, Hana has only one vestige of comfort and family into which she can retreat: her stepmother, “Clara of the canoes, the last one in [her] family” (Ondaatje 130). When Hana is at the height of her suffering, she cannot contact Clara, despite the despair she feels at their separation, because she is not prepared to cope with the loss of her father, Patrick:

All through the last year in Italy she has carried the letters from Clara. [. . .] She carried them in her suitcase, each containing a flake of pink rock and that wind. But she has never answered them. She has missed Clara with a woe but is unable to write to her, now, after all that has happened to her. She cannot bear to talk of or even acknowledge the death of Patrick. (Ondaatje 91-2)

Finally at the end of the novel, when Hana is left with no other options because her solace with Kip has been exploded, she returns to Clara, the last remaining symbol of her past, in the hope of liberating herself from the diabolical world of war:

I will take a bus up to Parry Sound. And from the mainland send a message over the shortwave radio out towards the Pancakes. And wait for you, wait to see the silhouette of you in a canoe coming to rescue me from this place we all entered, betraying you. How did

you become so smart? How did you become so determined? How were you not fooled like us? (Ondaatje 296)

Like Kip, who withdraws into places or people untouched by war, Hana searches for comfort and a means of healing in the one person she knows who had the strong-mindedness and shrewdness not to lose either herself or her sense of truth in the war.

Despite my claim that Kip and Hana eventually lose their ability to engender survival in one another, many scholars view the ending as one of optimism because, in the final scene of the novel, Ondaatje illustrates a continued psychic connection between Kip and Hana that extends into the future:

And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles.

(Ondaatje 301-2)

According to Susan Ellis, who explains Kip's reaction at the end in terms of a new vision of masculinity that focuses more on a man's relationship to family and community than on separation and violence, the end of the novel depicts a miraculous hopefulness that allows Kip and Hana to share a psychic togetherness:

The final vision of Kip, or Kirpal as the novel now acknowledges him, is of a man involved in his community's welfare as a doctor, riding his bicycle for the four-mile journey home, in his garden and with his laughing wife and children for their evening meal.

Magically, the novel's optimism allows the power of his newfound relational masculinity to transgress both time and space to include Hana. (35)

This analysis, however, misinterprets the connectedness between Kip and Hana as a positive resolution to the novel. On the contrary, because the only way the lovers can have a relationship in the future is through this extrasensory connection, the image Ondaatje projects in the final pages of the novel is one of tragedy.

Although Kip and Hana do in fact appear to share an emotional connection that continues into the future, what Ellis and other scholars who view a similar optimism in this scene fail to recognize is that, while Kip's future includes a successful career and a seemingly loving family, Hana is surrounded by people who are not the ones she truly desired. At the end of the novel, she resembles Clara at the beginning of the war: she is alone, smart, and honourable; and there is something about herself that she alone understands:

And Hana moves possibly in the company that is not her choice. She, at even this age, thirty-four, has not found her own company, the ones she wanted. She is a woman of honour and smartness whose wild love leaves out luck, always taking risks, and there is something in her brow now that only she can recognize in a mirror. Ideal and idealistic in that shiny dark hair! People fall in love with her. She still remembers the lines of poems the Englishman read out loud to her from his commonplace book. (Ondaatje 301)

According to Elizabeth Kella, even before she meets Kip, Hana attempts to redefine her identity in isolation from the world at war: “Hana attempts to efface the identity which is the product of her upbringing and to recreate an essential self untouched by the feuds of the world” (94). In extension of Kella’s claim, I would argue that in this final image, the way in which Hana has been “touched by the feuds of the world,” provides her with the knowledge and ability to create a nationless identity that sadly results in her isolation.

Hana is the only character living in the villa who is capable of identifying herself according to a truth not based solely on racial identity or past history. Her advanced knowledge, however, places her in the same position as her stepmother during the war. Although she is the one character who ends up closest to Almásy’s dream of a world with no borders, she achieves this knowledge at the cost of companionship. Interestingly, even her creator, Michael Ondaatje, cannot claim to share her perspective: “She is a woman I don’t know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life” (Ondaatje 301). Although critics like Stephen Scobie have mentioned that Hana at the end of the novel is “a figure unknown now even to her author,” none has mentioned reasons for Ondaatje’s solitary interjection claiming ignorance of her final position (103). If Hana’s solitude results because she alone has found a way to exist in a world without borders or nations, perhaps her author cannot fully know her because, although he relishes Almásy’s longing for a world not dominated by racial divisiveness, he likewise respects and understands Kip’s inability to ignore the

enduring racism underlying the United States' decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan.

CONCLUSION:
REMEMBERING WAR.

In her introduction to *Loving Arms*, Karen Schneider draws a parallel between the way society chooses to remember war and humanity's susceptibility to conducting war. She recognizes the power and privilege of the people who have the authority to decide how war is communicated to future generations:

Thus, both how war is narrated and by whom are matters of no small importance – especially when we consider Lynne Hanley's admonition that "how we imagine (or remember, or forget) war has a great deal to do with our propensity to make war" (*War* 4).

(Schneider 3-4)

Schneider focuses specifically on the question of *how* a society brings the memory and lessons of war into the future and relates it to the probability that another war will result. Considering all the wars that have followed the Second World War, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War, there appears to be a serious deficiency with the way war is remembered.

As this thesis has shown, one explanation for the disturbing absences within current depictions of war is the unresolved ruptures to language and meaning that continue to distort understanding in the twenty-first century. At the end of the Second World War, the twentieth century had just endured ten out of the last

thirty-one years which were dominated by world war; therefore, when the German and Japanese surrenders were finally official, there was a pervasive need to repair the shattered social order and countryside, and return, as much as possible, to “regular” life. Consequently, as Lawrence Langer explains of Holocaust victims, this yearning to return to normality has prevented language from incorporating the ramifications of mass murder:

Victims and survivors of the Holocaust learned to redefine the meaning of possibility during their captive years, but after the ordeal was over, those who returned were inclined to adjust – who can blame them? – to “normal” pursuits and get on with their pillaged lives as best they could. As a result, the habit of discussing the past with a familiar discourse continues, while new models for dealing with mass murder intellectually, morally, historically, and philosophically do not proliferate. (Langer *Admitting* 5)

According to Langer, although during the war Holocaust victims and survivors (and I would argue this particular explanation can extend to all sufferers of war) began to understand the permutations of concepts like “possibility,” these altered associations did not transfer, within the dominant discourse, to postwar life.

Furthermore, as Paul Fussell argues, there has been such an intense effort to remember the Second World War as “good”, “justified”, and “necessary” that the reality of precisely what mark it has left on both language and current political affairs has not yet been fully exposed:

Now, fifty years later, there has been so much talk about “The Good War,” the Justified War, the Necessary War, and the like, that the young and the innocent could get the impression that it was really not such a bad thing after all. It’s thus necessary to observe that it was a war and nothing else, and thus stupid and sadistic (142-3)

Fussell stresses the need to recognize the stupidity of war and the way that it reduces humanity to its most merciless and meaningless state. But, the reason language has not yet evolved to include the proliferation of meaning within words like “truth” is because such a transition would require a widespread acknowledgment that “we are all ashamed” of war, an admission that is resisted both privately and publicly throughout the world.

While Chapter III highlighted Elizabeth Bowen’s paradoxical attitude to truth, which contained her own and others’ simultaneous “dread” of and “desire” for honesty, the tendency, in terms of remembering war, has been that the fear of truth overpowers the longing for it. In *The Walnut Tree*, Martha Blum describes the power that guilt has to draw people together and to influence their behaviour. After receiving news that the Jews of Czernowitz will not return to their homes, the townspeople lose their shame and begin openly to enjoy the Jews’ possessions:

Rumours started flying: not just resettlement, they’re killing the Jews, no one will ever return. Marusja went to the Ahi fountain [. . .] The women wore Jewish things more openly now. “They won’t return. If we don’t wear it, others will.” And a strange alliance sprang from

common guilt. They watched each other, full of glee, judging the value of their possessions. (Blum 237)

Because of the baseness that underlies the townspeople's union, this "strange alliance" is not a positive force like the love described in Chapter I, but an example of how guilt and the inability to express it can lead to stagnation in meaning.

The main reason therefore that a new mode of understanding war has not been fully developed is the unresolved battle between truth and guilt that continues to be apparent within the political world. In *A History of Bombing*, Sven Linqvist draws a parallel between the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D. C., and the Shinto temple Yasukuni and its museum in Tokyo, both of which receive approximately 8,000,000 visitors each year, in order to expose how the unwillingness to show remorse prevents war from being remembered as the "stupid and sadistic" atrocity that it is. In describing the Yasukuni Temple, Lindqvist laments the museum's unrelenting praise of its nation's war heroes, which includes those guilty of the Nanking Massacre (174):

The message [of the museum] is best expressed on a memorial plaque set up by the Union for the Cause of the Special Attack Forces in 1985 in memory of the attack on Pearl Harbor: "Some 6,000 men died in suicide attacks that were incomparable in their tragic bravery and struck terror in the hearts of our foes. The entire nation sheds tears of gratitude for their unstinting loyalty and selfless sacrifice." (175)

Lindqvist explains that, although the entire Japanese nation does not share the sentiments of Yasukuni, “[f]or many Japanese, Yasukuni is an example of how feelings of guilt, if they are never acknowledged, can lead a nation to a collective denial of its past” (175).

As he continues this section entitled “Hiroshima,” Lindqvist exposes the similar collective denial represented by the American “historical” depiction of Hiroshima and its aftermath at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. For the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1995, Martin Harwit, the director of this museum, planned to unveil a memorial exhibit that would simultaneously praise the efficiency of military technology and lament the human tragedy created by the atomic bomb:

But Harwit did not only want to glorify military technology and effectiveness. The idea was also to put the bombing of Hiroshima into its historic context, describe the situation at the end of the Pacific War, give the arguments for and against the bombing, and show the effects of the bombing, the human tragedies and the inheritance that the bombing left to the Cold War and the armaments race. (Lindqvist 176)

Despite the disturbing aspects of his desire “to glorify military technology and effectiveness,” it is noteworthy that Harwit wanted to counterbalance his praise of the military’s capacity for destruction with an admission of not only the human destruction caused by the bombs but also the legacy of devastation left by the atomic bomb.

After receiving extensive protest from veterans organizations supported by the *Washington Post*, combined with a threat from Congress to “reduce support not only for the Air and Space Museum, but for the entire Smithsonian Institution,” Harwit’s exhibit was reduced to a version that minimized, if not eliminated, Japan’s losses and highlighted American victory (Lindqvist 176):

First, the entire scholarly debate about the decision to drop the bomb was taken away [. . . including] the quotes from Eisenhower, MacArthur, and other famous generals who were against the bomb [. . .] Only a single photograph of a dead Japanese was allowed. [. . .] Now the story went that Truman decided to drop the bomb solely to save lives. He believed that Hiroshima was a purely military target. And civilians in the true sense of the word hardly existed in Japan at the time, since even women and children were armed with bamboo spears. Thanks to the bomb, and only to the bomb, the war ended immediately with Japan’s unconditional surrender. (Lindqvist 176-7)

Notwithstanding the claims in a 1946 U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey and elsewhere that “Japan would have surrendered even if atomic bombs had not been dropped” and “the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs did not defeat Japan, nor [. . .] did they persuade Japan to accept unconditional surrender,” combined with a blatant refusal to accept the irrefutable reality that Hiroshima was in fact a city filled with thousands of innocent civilians who were subsequently maimed and murdered by the atomic bomb, Harwit and the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum were forced by

public pressure, to present a version of history that submerged, if not extinguished, truth (Lindqvist 118).

At the end of this section, Lindqvist returns to the notion of underlying guilt in order to complete his parallel between Yasukin and the Air and Space Museum: “For many Americans, this cancelled exhibit was an example of how never-expressed feelings of guilt can cause a kind of voluntary cerebral hemorrhage [sic], which erases what a nation has neither the will nor the strength to remember” (177). But, although the above-mentioned groups have “neither the will nor the strength” to relinquish their sense of guilt and admit the inhumanity that enables war to occur, texts like *The Walnut Tree*, *The Ash Garden*, and *The English Patient* react against this tendency by exposing the ruptures to language and social networks that continue to exist in the twenty-first century. These texts attempt to replace what Lawrence Langer calls “a discourse of consolation,” with “a discourse of ruin” that properly conveys the way in which war experience has altered language:

If we go on using a discourse of consolation about an event for which there is none, it is partly because old habits of language cling like burrs to the pelts of civilization, and partly because no full-fledged discourse of ruin, more appropriate to our hapless times, has yet emerged. A discourse of ruin may sound frightening, but only if we mistake it for a statement about the permanent defeat of hope. It simply asks us to be honest about the nature of the ruin[.] (Langer *Admitting* 7)

Through their attempts to explore the motives of racism and power out of which the Second World War developed, authors like Blum, Bock, Ondaatje, and the others mentioned in the introduction, become part of an effort to promote collective healing not only by exposing the continued insufficiency of language to convey genocide, but also by enabling the emergence of a discourse that appropriately characterizes the travesties of war.

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